THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER

REVIEWED

ELEMENTAL

CITY OF HEROES: GOING ROGUE

DEAD RISING 2

RUSE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

GUILD WARS

COVER TITLES ARE CLICKABLE!

$8.99US

12

NUMBER 207
DEC 2010

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

BIOSHOCK INFINITE: THE WORLD'S FIRST TOUR

THE MATRIX MEETS BLADE RUNNER IN DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

PLUS: THE MOST TERRIFYING GAME OF THE YEAR

PC GAMER

DECEMBER 2010

CLICKING A TITLE TAKES YOU DIRECTLY TO THE ARTICLE

MONITOR

ONLIVE GOES LIVE 5
NEWS 6
THE SPY 7
LEGO UNIVERSE / NEVERDAUNT: 8-BIT 8
WORLD OF TANKS / RIFT: PLANES OF TELARA 9
DEV MAN TALKING 10
IN SIMULATION 11
ALTERNATE LIVES 12
TACTICAL ADVANTAGE 13
FACE-OFF 14

PREVIEWS

DIABLO III 15
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION 16
SWORD OF THE STARS 2 17

FEATURES

GUILD WARS 18
BIOSHOCK INFINITE 23

REVIEWS

RUSE 26
DEAD RISING 2 28
ELEMENTAL: WAR OF MAGIC 29
VICTORIA II 31
CITY OF HEROES: GOING ROGUE 32
WORMS RELOADED 32
SAM & MAX: SEASON 3, EPISODES 4 & 5 32
AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT 33
COMMANDER: CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS 34
ARMA II: BRITISH ARMED FORCES DLC 34
FRONT MISSION EVOLVED / QUAKE LIVE 35
PUZZLE QUEST 2 36

EXTRA LIFE

DOWNLOADS 37
HOW TO: STARCRAFT II 38

HARD STUFF

MAINGEAR SHIFT 39
FERRARI WIRELESS GT COCKPIT 430 40
Q&A, DAS KEYBOARD PRO S, TRINITY 40

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE 3
LETTERS 4
BACKSPACE 41

PLEASE NOTE

Screen shots and other artwork in this pdf have been downsampled and compressed. For the most accurate representation of game artwork please refer to your hard copy of PC Gamer.

PC GAMER®

#207 DECEMBER 2010

EDITORIAL
Editor-in-Chief Logan Decker
Senior Editor Evan Lahti
Reviews Editor Dan Stapleton
Associate Editor Josh Augustine
Copy Editor Chris Comiskey
Intern Michael Quach
Contributors Al Bickham, Richard Cobbett, Desslock, Tom Francis, Troy Goodfellow, Frank LePore, Christopher Livingston, Andy Mahood, Rich McCormick, Tyler Nagata, Craig Pearson, Rachel Penny, Tom Senior, Drew Smith, Tim Stone, John Walker
Producer Debra Guilfoyle
Edit Squirrel Tabasco

ART
Lead Designer Dan Fitzpatrick
Contributing Designer Christin Chi
Photographers Mark Madeo, Samantha Berg

BUSINESS
Publisher Kristen Salvatore
ksalvatore@futureus.com
Vice President, Games Kelley Corten
kcorten@futureus.com
Vice President, Sales and Marketing Rachelle Considine
rconsidine@futureus.com
Executive Director Integrated Sales Nathan Hunt
415-269-5408, nhunt@futureus.com
National Sales Manager Isaac Ugay
714-381-3419, iugay@futureus.com
Regional Sales Director Carol Gillard
646-723-5476, cgillard@futureus.com
Regional Sales Manager Arthur St. Germain
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
Detroit Consumer Manager Alan Dickinson
248-792-2408, alandmedia@comcast.net
Senior Marketing Manager Andrea Recio-Ang
650-238-2548, arecio-ang@futureus.com
Marketing Coordinator Allyson Kardel
akardel@futureus.com
Advertising Coordinator Jose Urrutia
jurrutia@futureus.com

PRODUCTION
Production Director Michael Hollister
Senior Production Coordinator Dan Mallory
Print Order Coordinator Linh Chau-Ward

CONSUMER MARKETING
Vice President, Consumer Marketing Rich McCarthy
Circulation Director Stephanie Blake
Newsstand Director Bill Shewey
Consumer Marketing Operations Director Lisa Radler
Renewal And Billing Manager Mike Hill
Online Marketing Director Adam Whinston
Customer Service Manager Mike Frassica

FUTURE US, INC.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com
Tel 650-872-1642
Fax 650-872-2207

President John Marcom
Vice President/CFO John Sutton
Human Resources Director Nancy Durlester DuBois

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES
To Subscribe: www.pcgamer.com/subscribe
Customer Service: 800-898-7159, www.pcgamer.com/customerservice, pcgcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com

Future US, Inc. is part of Future plc. Future plc produces carefully targeted magazines, websites and events for people with a passion. We publish more than 180 magazines, websites and events and we export or license our publications to 90 countries around the world.
Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).

Future Plc
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon,
Ba1 2bw, England
www.futureplc.com
Tel +44 (0) 1225 442244 (Bath)
Tel +44 (0) 7042 4000 (London)

Chief Executive Stevie Spring
Non-executive Chairman Roger Parry
Group Finance Director John Bowman

Fan Service

Flame beanie from www.geekculture.com

Four members of the *PC Gamer* crew stood before a packed audience at this year's PAX Prime in downtown Seattle for a show-and-tell that we called "PC Gaming: A Playground for the Exotic." The idea of the panel discussion was to take fans on a tour of the most interesting, delightful, creative and bizarre trends happening right now in PC gaming. Now, it's likely that most of the audience, being a gathering of some of our biggest fans, was already familiar with some or even most of what we showed that day, but we wanted to make sure that they'd heard about *all* of them. (You can listen to the panel discussion and check out the links at http://bit.ly/aOYMzy.) Because it's no exaggeration to say that these kinds of things—from *Chex Quest* mods to *Minecraft* to the folks at Tactical Gamer and *Sleep is Death*—lie at the very heart of what makes PC gaming great. These games, sites and services are why we're fans.

There's a common thread that runs through each one of them, and that's that the PC isn't just a gaming platform—it's a *creativity* platform. That's why we get so uptight over games that don't give us the option of playing on dedicated servers, or insist that we maintain a constant internet connection to play single-player games. It's not necessarily the policies themselves, it's just that the very idea of constraints tends to offend us. Independence, freedom and creativity are in our DNA.

What's truly unique about PC gaming, however, is that the most creative work often doesn't emanate from big developers, but from the players—from our own inventiveness and imaginations. That's why our panel had less to do with the titans of the industry and more to do with the real driving force behind our platform—*you*.

LOGAN DECKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
logan@pcgamer.com

WHODUNIT

Evan Lahti
Senior Editor
Evan argues for Zerg supremacy in *StarCraft II* on page 32, then downloads the new *ArmA 2* DLC for review on page 83.

Dan Stapleton
Reviews Editor
Reviewing *Worms Reloaded* on page 79 rekindles some of Dan's fond memories of PC gaming in the 90s.

Craig Pearson
News Editor (*PC Gamer* UK)
From the floating streets of Columbia, Craig files an exclusive eye-witness report on *BioShock Infiite* on page 56.

Josh Augustine
Associate Editor
Josh is the first person outside of ArenaNet to delve into the dungeons of *Guild Wars 2*. See what riches await on page 44.

PC GAMER (ISSN 1080-4471) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue. Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in South San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Basic subscription rates: one year (12 issues + 12 CDs) US: $29.95; Canada: US$49.95. Foreign: US$69.95. Canadian and foreign orders must be prepaid, US funds only. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688. PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand only specials. **POSTMASTER:** Send changes of address to PC Gamer, PO Box 5158, Harlan, IA 51593-0658. Standard Mail enclosed in the following edition: None. Ride-Along enclosed in the following editions: B1, C1, C2, C3, C4. Returns: Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes Maximum PC, MacLife, Nintendo Power, The Official Xbox Magazine, PlayStation: The Official Magazine, World of Warcraft Official Magazine, NVISION, Guitar World, Revolver, Guitar Aficionado, Windows: The Official Magazine, MOM, Crochet Today! and Pregnancy. Entire contents copyright 2010, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in PC Gamer. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of PC Gamer. Products named in the pages of PC Gamer are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: PC Gamer Customer Care, PO Box 5158, Harlan, IA 51593-0658. Phone: 1-800-898-7159. Web: www.pcgamer.com/customerservice. Email: pcgcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com. Back issues can be purchased by calling 1-800-865-7240.
REPRINTS: Reprint Management Service. Phone: 717-399-1900 x.100.

SEND

EMAIL letters@pcgamer.com
TWITTER @PCGamer
FACEBOOK facebook.com/PCGamermagazine
WRITE PC Gamer Letters
4000 Shoreline Ct, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080

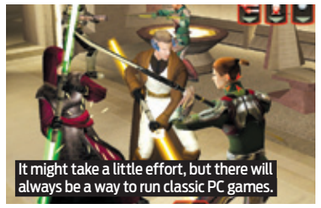
Your emails, Facebooks, Twitters, and yes, we still get the occasional letter

BACK CHATTER

- I can't afford to play *Civilization* anymore. *Civilization IV* literally takes all of my life away. ***Nick Ward***
- Just won a pair of headphones from @astrogaming and @pcgamer! So happy—old pair of headphones was on its last legs. ***@Paddy_OSullivan***
- The cover of *PC Gamer* #205 is so achingly beautiful, I want to have Leo DiCaprio enter my brain *à la Inception* and convince me I'm in the *Star Wars* universe. ***@david_shea***
- Hey, who else had a heart attack after playing *Singularity*? Damn! Awesome! Very thrilling! ***Yusra Hashim***
- *Heroes of Newerth* has a very high asshat-factor. The game is very good; the people, not so much. ***Cort Jensen***
- I wanted to point out that there is a large spoiler within the first 30 seconds of the *StarCraft II* behind-the-scenes DVD. ***Riley McGee***
- *Elemental* has a lot of throwback "panache" to it, while providing modern entertainment. I see it consuming many, many hours a day while being a true "Just one more turn!" type game. ***Greg Bosko***
- @pcgamer *Torchlight II* with co-op is awesome. Now I can try to get my wife to play. ***@krankycheese***

Upgrade pains

When I started using Vista and then Windows 7, games like *Battle for Middle-earth II*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II* and a multitude of other games made in the XP era simply ceased to function. It makes me howl into oblivion (ah, *Oblivion*, one of the few great games that does work without any problems) as I try in vain to follow iffy-at-best advice on forums to get these games to work. I didn't realize that my mutual exchange of trust with game developers became void as soon as XP became obsolete. ***Alexander Jones***



It might take a little effort, but there will always be a way to run classic PC games.

Developers can't foresee what Microsoft might do a few years later, so it's always a concern that old games won't play nice with the new version of Windows. However, the fact that we can usually still get these games working, with a little help from forums, is a huge strength of our platform. We can tweak .INI files and apply community-made patches to resurrect games that were made 20 years ago, or we can run virtual machines or dual-boot with Windows XP to LAN party like it's 2001. Console gamers can't, unless it's on the backward compatibility list. We think of it as an advantage of PC gaming, not a fault. ***PCG***

Chronoboost!

I got the September issue of *PC Gamer* in late July. Don't you know time machines are so last year? ***Some random kid named Tim***

We only found out when we got your email next April. ***Some random editor named Logan***

THE HOT MAIL

Enablers

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: This issue may contain awesomeness so awesome it makes you want to play the awesome games in it so that you can be awesome.

I recently quit playing *World of Warcraft*. However, you are *not helping*. Every time I open your magazine I see some new article on *Cataclysm*. At first I would just skip over them, because I am stronger then the game, but recently I have been getting the itch again—and I blame *PCG*! You are enablers, trying to get us back in the game! What do you do in your spare time? Smoke in front ex-smokers? Drink in front of alcoholics? I bet you do. In short, I demand that you issue a warning that *WoW* content is upcoming in future magazines.

P.S. How sweet are those goblins? Dammit, it's happening again! ***Brandon Schulte***

You caught us—we admit it, we want everyone everywhere to play and enjoy PC games, and we won't rest until we've achieved that goal! Actually, calling us "PC gaming enablers" is among the nicest things anyone's ever said to us. ***PCG***

A great letter deserves a great prize; that's why we're sending Brandon a copy of *RUSE* in appreciation of his stellar correspondence. Look up top to see how you can get in touch with *PC Gamer* and earn your chance to win next month's PRIZE OF MYSTERY!

Military-grade sarcasm

I am a Paratrooper assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division and am expecting to head to Iraq (if there is still a "war" going on) or Afghanistan sometime next year. Having deployed with my computer before, *Half-Life 2* and *Dawn of War* got me through my second tour in Iraq. If it wasn't already obvious, your average troop doesn't exactly have personal internet access. Fortunately, Steam includes the very useful feature of signing in offline, and even Games for Windows Live allows this essential functionality.

So I would like to tell Ubisoft "thank you" on behalf of the entire US military, who would otherwise be distracted by such great games as *Assassins Creed II* and *Silent Hunter 5*. Thanks to you, we will now be free to not play those games at all. No longer will our day-to-day job of worrying about suicide bombers or exploding barrels (life does imitate art sometimes) be interrupted by thoughts of playing those otherwise great games. Valve, Microsoft and whomever else should be ashamed of providing us with electronic entertainment during our down time. ***SSG Hendrix***

Wanderlust

Why has there never been another game since *Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast* and *BGII* to provide us the same sense of wonder, adventure and amazement? I recently replayed both

Why has there never been a game since *Baldur's Gate* to provide us with the same sense of wonder?

and it may be just me, but those games had something that I haven't seen in my PC gaming before or since. What's the deal, and where can I find more like them? ***Mark Pruett***

I loved the Baldur's Gate *games too, and wrote hundreds of pages on strategies just for* TOTSC *and the* BGII *expansion,* Throne of Bhaal. *Unfortunately, BioWare drifted away from that design style in subsequent games, which were more story-driven but also more linear and less expansive.* Dragon Age: Origins, *however, marked a return to the sort of epic fantasy that made the* BG *games so compelling, and is definitely your best bet if you haven't sampled it. If you're not prejudiced against the different camera perspective and more action-oriented combat, open world games like* Risen, Fallout 3 *and* Oblivion *offer plenty of amazement and wonder in large fantasy worlds.* ***Desslock***

Some of what made *Baldur's Gate II* great can be found in modern RPGs, especially *Dragon Age: Origins*.

All in good fun

Isn't life hard enough for lovers of turn-based gaming without *PC Gamer* mocking them? It was bad enough that you recently fawned over the real-time *XCOM* reboot (which is basically *X-COM* with all of the *X-COM* scraped out, to paraphrase Richard Pryor), but then you had to go out of your way to insult one of the few turn-based games of the year. Three of the four caption jokes in the *Disciples III* preview in the August issue were made at the expense of the turn-based gaming's mechanisms. I more or less only buy your magazine because I hope to catch a glimpse of a game like this, so I couldn't help taking it somewhat personally. ***Jim Gitman***

*No offense intended, Jim. Take a peek through our sections: roughly three quarters of all of our captions in every story, regardless of genre, are jokes at the expense of the game in question. Besides, it's hard for us to feel sorry for turn-based fans when they just received two big games—*Elemental: War of Magic *(reviewed on page 72) and* Civilization V*! Try not to get too bent out of shape over the new* XCOM*, either—just because it's becoming a first-person shooter doesn't mean it can't be a good game in its own right. Just do what Dan, our resident* X-COM *fanatic, does: imagine it's called* FPSCOM *instead, and keep a steady eye on www.xenonauts.com, the home page of the promising indie homage to the original* X-COM. ***PCG***

Imaginary geography fight!

You stated on page 13 of the August issue that Azeroth, at 487 square miles, is bigger than Los Angeles. YOU LOSE! Los Angeles is 498.3 square miles. ***Norbert Meyer***

Someone's been on Wikipedia, we see! Load up the page again—that figure includes 29.2 square miles of water. The land *area of LA is 469.1 square miles. Advantage: Azeroth!* ***PCG***

PRTSCN

I'm using my "Magic Staff" on the Great Bear in *Dragon Age: Origins*. **Michael Moise**

You're a brave man—we've learned not to unnecessarily antagonize multi-ton animals with claws the size of carving knives. But since you checked, we must admit we're curious—what *is* the internal temperature of a Great Bear? ***PCG***

SHOW US YOURS Tell us your story with a great screenshot. Include PRTSCN in the subject line and you could win a sweet prize like Michael's new copy of *RUSE*!

BACK CHATTER

- I owned a PC for most of my life. I bought a Macbook Pro for school and figured I'd just sell the PC and use Boot Camp for my PC games. Bad idea. Well, I am back in the fold of PC games with my new Asus G73X1, and life is good. ***Aaron Cole***
- What's so special about *StarCraft II*? ***Mirr Ziaulhaq***
- *Elemental* looks to be a worthy successor to the old *Master of Magic*, which I dearly loved and still play occasionally. The *Civ* series has never had any appeal for me for some reason, so it's *Elemental* all the way from where I stand. ***John Adams***
- Point-and-click adventure... NOW...MORE NOW! ***Andrew E. Konietzky***
- I'm kinda upset about the *WoW* mini Thor pet you get from the *SC2* collector's edition. I sooo wanted it to say "I'm heah! Cleek me!" But no sign of The Governator soundalike. Anyone else feel let down? ***Frank Lordi***

WHERE WE PLAY

Play on the official *PC Gamer* community servers

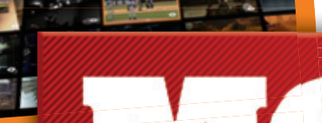
Team Fortress 2
66.151.138.34:27015

ArmA II
75.102.38.3:2332

Counter-Strike Source
207.210.252.63

Ventrilo (voice chat)
208.100.40.19:3796

Our game servers are provided by Art of War Central, *PCG*'s staff-approved hosting service. Visit ***artofwarcentral.com***



It's not a joint for hardcore shooter fans, but the service actually works

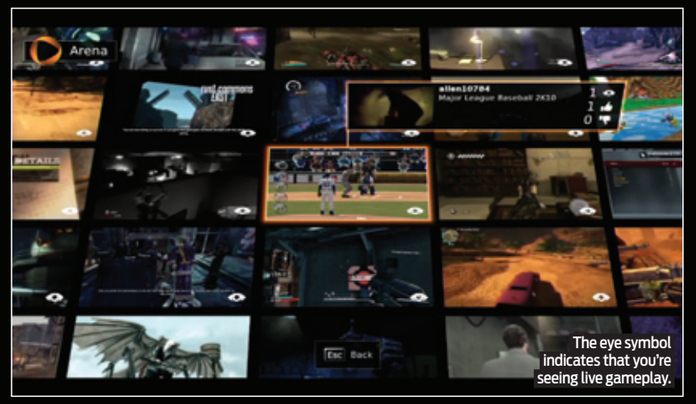
OnLive Goes Online

Yes, you can play **MAFIA II** and **BORDERLANDS** on a six year-old PC without a videocard—but at what cost?

Wait, *Mafia II?* Without a videocard? Believe it. By rendering game graphics on heavy-duty servers stashed across the country and streaming the results to you over the internet, OnLive sweeps away many of the traditional bugaboos of PC gaming—ever-rising hardware requirements, head-scratching video options, wobbly drivers—and makes PC gaming as easy as dropping a disc into a console machine. And despite loads of pre-launch skepticism from all sides, the service actually works—while introducing a few bugaboos of its own.

The first impressions are strong. The interface is slick and effortless, and since OnLive stores games on offsite servers, no game installations are required. You pay, press play, and you're in—just like that. Going from *Borderlands* to *Arkham Asylum*, for example, takes all of a few seconds. You get basic messaging features—such as text messaging and game invites/requests—for your friends list, as well as access to a dazzling Arena page that allows you to spectate footage from live players in any game that OnLive offers for casual browsing or to pick up a few battle strategies (and that means that other gamers can spy on *your* in-game exploits as well).

Regardless of the speed of your internet connection (OnLive recommends a minimum 5Mbps downstream) lag is intrinsic to the service. On our 30Mbps test connection, for example, lag was perceptible but not unmanageable. OnLive isn't—and doesn't mean to be—a joint for hardcore multiplayer shooter fans, but even laid-back players may be put off by video compression that's amazingly efficient, but still much murkier than what PC gamers are used to seeing at 1280x720. OnLive also lacks wireless network support, and hardware requirements—including a dual-core processor—are higher than what we expected. But OnLive CEO Steve Perlman suggests that these stats are both deliberately conservative and temporary. Beta WiFi streaming should be ready by the time you're reading this, and "on about 100 netbooks tested so far, we've seen about *four* that there was a problem. And a single-core Pentium 4 [CPU]—if it's fast enough—works just fine too," says Perlman.



The eye symbol indicates that you're seeing live gameplay.

Our experience confirms that the specs are indeed higher than they need to be, but a far more serious gotcha lurks in the fine print. OnLive's subscription plan doesn't net you any games—only access to the OnLive streaming application; you then have to "buy" games separately. We're putting quotes around "buy" in this instance because, according to the terms of service, if you ever cancel your subscription to OnLive, you lose your access to all the games you paid for—forever. OnLive allows you to suspend your account for up to a year without charge, but if you want out for good, it's *sayonara* to your games. (*Psst...* for a workaround, see "Dude, where's my game?" on page 12.)

There are other caveats to consider as well. Many ISPs, including Comcast and AT&T Uverse, may pile on additional fees if you exceed a certain amount of total monthly data, even with "unlimited" plans—and they won't always tell you what that data cap is. And OnLive isn't exactly easy on your internet's pipes (see "Bandwidth buster," left). OnLive helps minimize bandwidth consumption by deactivating the app if it's left inactive for 15 minutes, but this is more annoying than advantageous; if you pause for dinner, for example, you'll have to restart the application, and then your game as well.

Lag and bandwidth issues are bound to be endemic to all game-streaming services, but we hope the same won't be said about the terms. That's why we'll be keeping an evye out on the progress of similarly-fashioned services including Dave Perry's Gaikai (www.gaikai.com)

(Continued on page 14)

Bandwidth buster

How much bandwidth does OnLive usurp from average Joe Gamer? More than you might think. Metered ISP customers beware!

225GB/month*

*Time spent in OnLive per day: 3 hours. Total time spent over 30 days: 90 hours (*3 hours x 30 days*). Average (download) bandwidth used per hour in games: 2.5GB (*6mbps/.7MBps x 3600 seconds / 1 hour*). Total bandwidth used for 30 days: 225GB (*2.5GB x 90 hours*)

Dude, where's my game?

CEO Steve Perlman on what you can, you can't, and really *can* do with OnLive.

PCG: So right now, you pay for OnLive's basic service. Then you can buy "unlimited" full versions of games. But according to the terms of service, if you cancel, you're going to lose all those games.

SP: Well, nobody's paying for the service for at least a year. [*As of press time, all charter OnLive subscribers receive the first year of service free. —Ed.*] And we don't know if we'll *ever* charge a subscription fee. The reason we have to have that there is in case a person goes on and buys just one game and plays it on and on forever. Our goal is not to have to charge a subscription fee.

So if you want to keep your games by suspending the service for up to a year, can you reactivate it for two weeks or even a few days and then re-suspend for a year again?

Yes! And the reason that the cancelation thing is even there—we have people that are "tire-kickers." And so they get on and maybe they just played a demo. If a year goes by and the guy doesn't even login or touch anything, we want the right to be able to delete his data without having to store it forever.

But as stands, right now, if you say: "Know what? I want to cancel." If you've bought games—they're gone, right?

Yeah, but since we're not going to charge you anything until the end of year, if then, there's no reason to suspend or cancel the account.

And, from whatever day you sign up, we'll keep [your games] around for 365 days from that day regardless. But on day 366—if you ignore all the warning emails and you're just off on your way—we do have the right to cancel your games. *Will* we cancel your games that day? Probably not.

But shouldn't that still be called "renting" a game instead of "purchasing" in the terms of service? Because once you purchase something, you should always have it.

Well, we use the term "Play Pass" instead of purchase or rental. All Play Passes are, arguably, a form of rental. The full Play Pass is just a really long rental. We want to keep every game for the full Play Pass available for as long as the service is operating—which is hopefully forever.

The terms of service mentions "third party software." Does this term refer to games? If so, it does say: "*buying* or accessing certain third party software."

Third party software? Yes, that would be things like videogames. Ubisoft, for example, would be a third party.

And it says "buying."

Right—but then it says "accessing," which refers to the games. "Buying" refers to a game's DLC. We'd like to be able to offer you things you can buy. So the only thing we have—you're correct—are rentals.

> **"So the only thing we have—you're correct—are rentals."**
>
> ***Steve Perlman—CEO, founder and president of OnLive.***

(Continued from page 13)

and GameStreamer (www.gamestreamer.com).

On the other hand, it was less than a year ago that many folks—including *PC Gamer*—wondered if this kind of "cloud" gaming could be made to work at all. And we've found that it not only works, but works very, very well. OnLive has every reason to boast about its service, and for that reason, its slow-and-steady rollout and conservative recommended specs put an even brighter shine on the company. ***Chris Comiskey***

NEVERWRITER

ANNOUNCED CRYPTIC STUDIOS IS MAKING ITS FIRST NON-MMO

Cryptic, most recently known for *Star Trek Online*, is calling its next game *Neverwinter*. It's a five-player online co-op fantasy RPG set in the Neverwinter realm of the *D&D* universe. Each player chooses a cleric, wizard, warrior, rogue or ranger, and customizes it with Cryptic's famed character creation tech.

Cryptic says the goal is to combine the exploration of *Oblivion* and the story-driven approach of *Dragon Age*, then release new content for it every month. It's due out toward the end of 2011. **TF**

ATI IS DEAD—LONG LIVE AMD

REBRANDED RADEON GPUS TO BE SOLD WITH THE AMD NAME

Last month, ATI parent company AMD decided to lose the ATI name for good. Why? Honest to God: they did a survey and discovered *no one cares*. Specifically, they found that AMD was a much more recognizable name for PC users than ATI, and people were fine with their graphics card being called an "AMD Radeon." **TF**

NOW PLAYING

AT THE PC GAMER WEB STORE

Are you still not sold on the new-fangled idea of streaming your games from a remote server? Do you still prefer downloading a game to your hard drive and running it locally, the way God intended? We're here for you! You'll find a plentiful selection of good old-fashioned downloadable games at **www.pcgamer.com/store**.

City of Heroes: Going Rogue

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4

Need for Speed World

Sid Meier's Civilization V

Mafia II

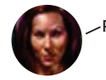
Duke's Back

Pigs fly: **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER** returns from the dead in 2011

You just can't keep a good over-the-top action hero down. A year after being pronounced a casualty of developer 3D Realms' closure, *Duke Nukem Forever* punched a clenched fist out of its grave at this year's PAX conference, dripping with machismo and waving a flag bearing the insignia of *Borderlands* and *Brothers in Arms* developer (and proud new *Duke Nukem* IP-owner) Gearbox Software, which has pledged to complete the decade-overdue project by next year.

And it passes the vaporware test: not only was the new *Duke* up and running at the show, but we actually got to *play* it with our own comparatively scrawny hands. Duke began our brief time together by relieving himself at a urinal, then sprinting to tackle a massive alien mecha-colossus at the 50 yard line of a football field. Emerging victorious from the ensuing intense, old-school circle-strafe rocket launcher battle, Duke kicked its giant, dismembered eye through the uprights for an extra point in the war on butt-ugly aliens. It's been a while, but he hasn't lost his style. ***Evan Lahti***

GOG.com Drops a Bomb



The DRM-free service celebrates its third year with **BALDUR'S GATE**

The folks in Warsaw know how to party: the Poland-based GOG.com digital distribution service—which distributes more than 230 classic PC games re-tooled for modern operating systems and without any DRM whatsoever—is celebrating its second anniversary by putting one of the most beloved games in PC history on its virtual wooden shelves. *Baldur's Gate: The Original Saga* is priced at $9.99 and includes the original *Baldur's Gate* as well as the *Tales of the Sword Coast* expansion, and packs a ton of extras from GOG.com's Bag of Holding including wallpapers, the soundtrack, avatars, artworks, maps, reference cards and manuals.

GOG.com is also officially dropping its "beta" tag and relaunching the site with a sleeker game browser, and more social functions such as user recommendations and "GOGmixes"—user-created playlists of games centered on a specific theme. The publishers hint at more releases in the very near future from Hasbro and Atari (owners of the brand and license, respectively), but in the meantime, it's what the service *doesn't* have—bullying DRM—that keeps us coming back for more. **LD**

THE SPY

The Spy had to work hard for this month's intel. Use it wisely.

The Spy dislikes this time of the year. It's the time when the publishers and developers start to get chatty. Convention time. Gamescon, PAX, even the echoes of E3 are still bouncing off the walls. It's hard to keep a job based around uncovering secrets when the industry's secret-keepers are acting like they've raided The Spy's liquor cabinet and chugged his truth serum (which The Spy keeps in a bottle labeled "Illicit Vodka" guarded by a series of elaborate traps to keep it safe).

So The Spy had to employ a few new tricks. Hiding in plain sight can be dangerous, but during large conventions it's often the best way to work.

Overheard in a restroom at Gamescom: Namco Bandai is playing the old "we can't have a licensed soccer game, so we'll make our own up" card. They've trademarked "City of Football," which sounds to The Spy vaguely like an MMO where roaming gangs of soccer players settle their scores on the mean streets of a dystopian/post-apocalyptic city. It could happen. Hey, this is what happens when The Spy gets a dry month: Spyculation based on urinal conversations.

What's not speculation is that Gearbox, which is currently in the process of digging up Duke Nukem's skeleton and playing ventriloquist with it, is considering the next game in their military shooter series, *Brothers in Arms*. The Spy managed to glean that info nugget while pretending to be a lanyard around games legend Warren Spector's neck. What's really odd was that Spector heard it by hiding under a table in Mark Rein's hotel room with John Romero. The game will be a long time coming, as they have *Duke*, *Borderlands* DLC, *Aliens: Colonial Marines* (that's on hiatus, but still coming), and whatever *Z-Day* (a trademark they filed a while back) is to get out the door first, but Gearbox is considering its options. The Spy would not appreciate a modern interpretation of the series, but WWII is played out, and 'Nam wouldn't fit the series' tone.

Sadly, Spector discarded what he thought was his lanyard before The Spy was able to constrict and take him down (just to prove that he could). On his way back to the convention hall for some funnel cake, The Spy spotted Cryptic's Creative Director, Jack Emmert. Assuming the form of an elaborate hotel mirror, The Spy hopped on a nearby wall and waited for the MMO expert to pass by. Instead, Emmert made goofy faces at himself in the ritzy Spy Mirror™ for 20 minutes. After making every face he could think of, Emmert repeated the mantra: "don't mention the dinosaur game, *don't* mention the dinosaur game," over and over to what he thought was himself. Dinosaur game, eh? And likely an MMO on top of that. Can *Brontosauruses* wielding boom sticks be far behind? The Spy hopes not.

> **"The next addition to *Brothers in Arms* is being considered."**

The Spy was about to de-mirrorize when someone else rounded the corner—this time a faceless drone that The Spy had no time for. But he did catch the loaf muttering: "don't mention *Rollercoaster Tycoon 4*," as he examined his teeth in The Spy's reflective body. The Spy must remember this mirror trick: people checking for spinach rarely consider the possibility that they're actually staring at a shapeshifted agent of espionage.

The Spy was finally able to return to his normal form, albeit with a bit of a crick in his neck. While using the hotel's chandelier to stretch it out, The Spy spotted a Microsoft employee with a new, slick phone in the lobby below. Thankfully, The Spy knows just how to get Microsoft employees to talk: "So, that looks like the iPhone but not as good." Defensive rage took over as the man began to shout, "Oh yeah, can the iPhone do this?" The Spy was demonstrated the phone playing turn-based multiplayer with the Xbox 360. The Microsoft guy then looked at the unimpressed scowl on The Spy's face and blurted: "this will work with PCs as well, and eventually in real-time."

Innnteresting. The Spy walked past an *Evil Genius 2* poster as he left, marvelling at his ability to scrape all this hidden knowledge from one convention.

Spy out. ■ ***The Spy***

Massive Attack

The Assembly faction focuses on helping players build awesome things in-game.

Just the basics, please

Not every LEGO lover will be interested in playing through the stories, quests, and mini-games that unlock bricks in *LEGO Universe*—some will simply want to dive into an infinite bucket of bricks and construct anything their imagination can come up with. That's why LEGO built a building tool that lets you do just that, and they're giving it away completely free! The *LEGO Digital Designer* may not have *LEGO Universe*'s flashy set pieces, AI scripting, or co-op play, but its utilitarian design allows you to you jump in and have fun building with bricks almost instantly. Pick it up at http://ldd.lego.com/. **JA**

Imagination is King

Build, share and battle with friends in **LEGO UNIVERSE** *by Josh Augustine*

Don't let the younger target audience scare you away. *LEGO Universe*'s lighthearted game design is such a refreshing change from the life-dominating design of current big-name MMOs that its kid-friendliness may be the exact reason why you *should* give the game a try.

After playing *WoW* for hundreds of hours, Creative Director Ryan Seabury described the extreme repetition necessary to achieve small stat boosts as "exhausting." "I didn't want to make a game that felt like work; like you had to put hours and hours into it. [I want *LU* to be] more of a casual, fun experience."

His solution is *LU*'s "creative endgame," which revolves around players building cool stuff with LEGO bricks on their in-game property. Each brick you build with must be earned through the directed content—completing quests, fighting enemies, or playing mini-games. So, when halfway through building your oversized LEGO Zergling, you realize that you'll need more sharp, pointy pieces to make it look adequately terrifying, you would jump into a mini-game or go complete a few quests for your faction to earn the bricks you need.

OK, I have to admit—I *did* jump in fright once when a samurai ghost popped out at me—but only once!

"I didn't want to make a game that felt like work, like you had to put hours and hours into it." *Ryan Seabury*

And with those bricks you can build creations as complex as your PC can handle—good news for us gamers and our more-than-capable rigs. Creations will be rated along a performance index—similar to the Window's Experience Index introduced with Vista—to let players know when they're reaching the limit of their computer's rendering capability (and to let potential visitors know if they'll be able to view your giant Zergling).

Thanks to the straightforward build mode and AI tools, there are already some incredible creations in the beta—from diners to dinosaurs—and Seabury wants to take it even further after the game launches on October 26th by letting players link their properties together with their friends' properties to create multi-room dungeons, as well as create their own quests and make stories to share with the rest of *LEGO Universe*. Count us in. ■

Dream Bigger

The indie alternative **NEVERDAUNT: 8BIT** opens every door to you

The rebel or anarchist who feels constrained by *LEGO Universe* might find more solace in *Neverdaunt: 8Bit*, the one-man project from Calvin Goble, who describes his game thus: "As if every LEGO set you owned as a kid came with no instructions and you tried to jam them into the cartridge slot of your Nintendo Entertainment System, but instead were teleported to a magical world."

We aren't sure what this is either, but somebody spent a lot of time making it.

N8 is a vintage realm of colorful blocks and colorful characters—both your fellow players and "APCs," player-actors that perform roles traditionally filled by NPCs, such as The Pumpkin King villain and lovable old Grandma who occasionally stops by to hand out cookies and coffee to players.

Like the other one-man MMO, *Love*, you're only likely to run into a couple dozen players logged in at any given time, but you can see the players' handiwork everywhere. Most of the 174 plots of land in the game are held by individual players, where they have sole building powers as long as they own it. Thanks to the wide range of LEGO-like pieces to build with and tronics—an in-game visual programming language that lets players give life to their creations—this eclectic playground is full of wildly diverse activities like pipe mazes, a four-man playable soccer game, and dark warehouses filled with evil Santas in need of slaying.

Everything about this game feels open and personal in a way that only indie games can—players greet each other like old friends and the developer walks around offering advice and loaning his powerful weapons to new players just to see them get excited. *N8* is free, in open beta and available for download at www.8bit.neverdaunt.com. ■ **JA**

All will suffer the wrath of DuckDragon!

Risky Tactics

Conquer Europe in *World of Tanks'* metagame

Closer to armored *Counter-Strike* than a top-down strategy game, *World of Tanks* plops you into session-based action shootouts where each player pilots a tank from an over-the-shoulder perspective.

New tanks and equipment upgrades can be unlocked with currency earned through battle and your persistent crew members level up through battlefield experience.

Of course, if that's all *WoT* offered, it wouldn't be light on the MMO sauce. And to be fair, *WoT* is free to play, supported by an optional subscription and cash shop, so it might be able to get away with just that. But *WoT* goes above and beyond to deliver a fresh, compelling experience with its Clan Wars gameplay—a *Risk*-style persistent territory-control struggle played across a massive world map.

It's a strong combination of action and complex strategy. Clan leaders can move troops between controlled territories, hire mercenaries, and arrange alliances or non-aggression pacts with other clan leaders. Each clan can choose to invade a territory once per day. This alerts the defending clan leader, who can choose a time within the next 24 hours to host the battle (a live match between players, up to 15v15) that will decide who controls the territory. Thousands of players will fight for their clan's control of the map's 186 European territories at launch, with hundreds more land chunks being added later as the battle expands across the globe. **JA**

Personally, I'd take Southern France for the wine and gorgeous coastlines.

Big star

St

That di
car
e
makin
Kor

Rift's Big Entrance

Static content is for sissies

Your world is under attack by dimensional invaders who are systematically ripping holes in the space-time fabric around your planet. Not good, but it gets worse. If you and the other players don't push in to close the rifts they open into your world—via a slick and co-op-able group quest—the interlopers will establish a foothold in the region, erecting structures and sending war parties at nearby towns that battle with local guards. If still left alone, the invaders will bring in a huge monster boss that marches toward the town, crushing everything in its wake (but offering incredible rewards for players that band together to defeat it).

On the flip side, if players are efficient at ripping through a specific dimension's rifts, they'll incur the wrath of that dimension, which will launch a massive invasion in that region. What first looks like punishment is actually a reward—this gives players additional drops from the dimension they're hunting most.

On this constantly-changing battlefield, you can't rely on set-in-stone strategies. Luckily, *Rift* has a tremendous class system that allows you to constantly change your character's abilities. At creation, characters choose between Warrior, Cleric, Rogue and Mage, which are divided further into four souls (talent trees) each. These trees provide all of your abilities and talents—there are no innate abilities—and often they play very differently. For example, the ranged-weapon specialist and the stealthy assassin both fall under Rogue. Mixing and matching between your archetype's souls to create new hybrid classes is incredibly empowering and offers more replayability than my math-lazy brain cares to calculate. **JA**

...ER
...EAR
...n't
...y time
...been
...Coconut
...uld never
...accusations
...Hilton swiftly
...ther is a saint
...ure compliance
...d drug testing. **JA**

...TION
... HANDS-ON

...Petrogylph showed off the ...control-point PvP maps in ...pcoming MMORTS, *End of ...ations*. The maps I played had five ...apture points, two offering a flow of ...esources and others granting access to ...oper weapons, like the catastrophic nuke. ...layers choose between blitzkrieging the ...nemy or going the more patient, strategic ...oute of collecting resources to power the nuclear facility and blast 'em at just the right moment. **JA**

BOARDING PARTY

STO SHIP INTERIORS ARE FINALLY CUSTOMIZABLE, CAPTAIN

Six months after launch, *Star Trek Online* is getting updates that address the two biggest complaints from fans at its release: a lack of Klingon content and a completely pointless bridge. In addition to raising the level cap and adding new ships and gear rewards, Season Two is adding eight episodes tailored specifically for Klingon players. The update also allows players to customize the bridge, engineering room, captain's room and crew on all of their ships, finally making their vessels feel like home. **JA**

...I per
...devel
...-frien
...though, ...l given
...bar in mo...ng I'm
...a future ...elopment
...s. In h... we... ...n to never stop
...pment, as ... the potential ou...
...tform has a... ...e great things we... can offer our users. ■ *...is Comiskey*

DEV MAN TALKING

Drew Smith is a Producer at 2K Games currently working on *XCOM*. He eats virtually all meals with chopsticks and in '85, bought a copy of *Yar's Revenge* for $3. Drew doesn't regret his severe addiction to *Team Fortress 2*, his love of particle physics or his aspiration to become a Chronomancer.

Game demos are important. They're also disproportionately overlooked during the course of development—usually because crafting a worthy demo requires substantial time and money. With bulging budgets and strict release dates to adhere to, it's often hard to make a pre-release demo a priority for a developer. On top of that, some games simply don't adapt well to demo form. While skipping the demo may be acceptable for established franchises, new IPs need the boost in consumer awareness that a thoughtfully produced demo can provide.

Sharing is caring

With their roots in shareware, demos have proven to be a successful route to catapult a game—or even an entire genre—from relative obscurity to being highly anticipated by the masses. Id's *Wolfenstein 3D* was one of the first games to capitalize on "try before you buy," and paved the way for *Doom*'s success by introducing the concept of the first-person shooter to the then-niche group of PC gamers who were frantically scanning BBSs on their 1200 baud modems.

The *Wolf 3D* and *Doom* demos were not only responsible for their own game's successes but arguably for the success of the entire FPS genre. A great demo draws in players—a necessity for untested franchises and gameplay types. Unless, of course, the game's design doesn't lend itself to being chopped up into small segments, as is the case with most RPGs.

The *Just Cause 2* demo, released earlier this year, let players run around for 30 minutes causing as much mayhem on the island as possible. After 30 minutes, the island reset and the clock restarted. Causing mass mayhem was the main focus of *JC2* and the demo let people see what the full game had to offer while still dangling the carrots of more dangerous helicopters and bigger explosions just in front of their faces. *BioShock* and *Left 4 Dead* also offered excellent demos, the former giving players enough taste of what was to come to whip up their anticipation and the latter bringing a new four-player co-op feature through the No Mercy level for anyone who pre-ordered the game on Steam.

Great expectations

A game demo can also communicate a developer's confidence in its game, and thus should never be taken lightly. Gamers expect that a demo will represent the best a game has to offer, but that isn't always the case, or even possible. As a developer, if you have to choose between putting out a shoddy demo and no demo at all, you go with the decision that's least likely to push customers away.

> "A great demo is almost a necessity for untested franchises."

And that can lead to tricky situations with a game like *Solium Infernum*, which offers excellent turn-based gameplay with moral themes. Its demo gave players 25 turns to play versus AI or other gamers. But it's difficult to explain all the nuances, complexity and gravitas of a game as subtly deep as *Solium Infernum* in that amount of time.

Regardless of whether or not demos suit every game, the expansion of digital distribution across all media is making them increasingly important. Impulse purchases are made with the click of a button, and everything developers can do to convince buyers to click that button is a good thing. Gamers burned by lazy platform ports, for instance, are understandably reluctant to drop their hard-earned Hamiltons on an unproven game. But while the days of shareware may be gone, strong demos can still help gamers decide which games to buy—and convince them to buy more of them. ■

One of the first great shooters had one of the first great demos as well.

IN SIMULATION

Working to feed his racing and flight sim addiction—without telling either "I love you more"—**Andy Mahood** has been devoting equal time to *rFactor*, *iRacing*, *Rise of Flight*, *DCS: A-10C Warthog (Beta)* and *DiRT 2*.

When *rFactor* hit the market back in 2005, it established a new business model for a changing sim-racing genre. Together with *Live For Speed*—an equally impressive UK-based indie sim—Image Space Inc.'s ambitious downloadable follow-up to its respected *F1* and *NASCAR* EA Sports franchises would ultimately entertain and captivate a new audience of sim fans.

What set *rFactor* apart from its competition was its unparalleled support for aftermarket mods. When I reviewed the sim in 2005 I noted that "ISI has created one of the most mod-friendly simulations in modern history and, with the support of talented third-party contributors, *rFactor* content should balloon exponentially with new series, cars and tracks."

Formula Vees at Indy? You can race just about anything you want, anywhere you want with *rFactorCentral* mods.

> "You won't get lost in a #*&@ pile of poorly-defined mods."

Mod it and they will come

Did it ever! Shortly after *rFactor's* official release, an industrious Aussie named Pete Walsh launched his own pet project—*www.rFactorCentral.com*—a slick and sortable online repository of third-party *rFactor* mods (the site's now owned by an outfit called IGT). Walsh's *rFactorCentral* currently boasts over a thousand car and circuit mods, including lowly go-karts, powerful F1 racers, and almost every race track you can think of (over 850 at last count).

Even better, you won't get lost in a confusing #*&@ pile of unidentified or poorly-defined mods because the site's elegant interface lets you sort through everything on your own terms. Mod name, release date, community rating, developer name and version number—these are all sorting critera. The standout contributions—those earning a community rating of 90% or better by at least 200 voters—eventually earn admission into the site's "Hall of Fame" page. You can also sort race circuit mods by geographic region and course type (road, oval, temporary, fantasy) and car mods by class and purpose (dirt, oval, etc.). Every mod on the site also has its own profile page where you can read a full description from its creator or peruse user ratings and comments.

One stop shopping

Accessorizing your *rFactor* experience at *rFactorCentral* is already a pretty effortless exercise but the site recently introduced a new "1-Click" car and track installation client that can make your future downloads even easier. For a $25 yearly fee, *rFactorCentral* will measurably increase the speed of your downloads and automatically install your chosen mod in the proper *rFactor* folder without any additional input on your part.

I already have dozens of third-party *rFactor* files on my hard drive (including some terrific series mods like *Grand Prix 1979*, *IZOD IndyCar*, and *Toyota Atlantic*) but I fear *rFactorCentral's* clever 1-Click install feature will swell that number to an absurd new level. ■

rFactor 2

New, improved, and just around the corner

We don't have a hard and fast release date yet (early 2011 looks likely) but ISI's in-development follow-up to the world's most moddable racing sim is already teasing us with exciting new features. "The new tire model will excel under combined slip and camber conditions," states ISI head honcho Gjon Camaj. "And the dynamic changes to pressure, temperature and wear will instantly affect the tire in a physically accurate way. For example, flat spots may result in vibrations."

"Our new force-feedback allows us to directly use physical forces being transmitted through the suspension, rather than muddying it up with equations and extraneous effects," Camaj explains. "For example, the vibration from driving over a sawtooth curb now comes from the tire model alternately gripping and releasing the ground as it bounces, reacting on the rim and hub, through the suspension and steering rack and finally to your hands. Things like the rubber buildup and drying lines will benefit as well."

I can get behind that. Stay tuned for future developments.

ALTERNATE LIVES

Desslock is slipping in a few hours of *The U6: Project, Arcania: Gothic IV, Two Worlds* and *StarCraft II* in between waiting in lines at the Toronto Film Festival.

The original titans of the RPG genre have gone the way of the dodo. Ubisoft has shown no interest in reviving the *Might & Magic* RPGs that it now owns. *Bard's Tale* was briefly resurrected as a profane action-RPG that merely tarnished the franchise's legacy. *Wizardry* died off in 2001, even if its skeletal remains still haunt some Japanese console spinoffs. But *Ultima* has suffered the most pitiful fate, since it's been consigned to an abominable online strategy game that's free to play only if you don't value your soul.

Enthusiastic rekindling

All is not lost, as *Ultima* fans refuse to let the greatest RPG series go quietly into the two-mooned night. Fan-made remakes of classics are perpetually in development, and there's a bunch for the *Ultima* games in various stages (http://bit.ly/dBexB8). But most attempted remakes are spawned by a cocktail of optimism and enthusiasm that isn't sufficiently potent to overcome the challenges and drudgery involved in completing a project.

Fortunately, the *Ultima* series has been blessed with extraordinarily dedicated fans. A few years ago *Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny* was completely remade using the *Dungeon Siege* engine as *Ultima V: Lazarus* (www.u5lazarus.com). Now *Ultima VI: The False Prophet* has also been remade in the *DS* engine as *The Ultima 6 Project* (www.u6project.com). The work involved in these recreations is inestimable—RPG fans owe a great debt to the teams that devoted years to supplementing these games and recreating them in a 3D engine.

Life in the Project

The middle trilogy of *Ultima* games had unique features for their time. They were open-world games that lacked a primary enemy and required you to adhere to a virtuous moral code. Even if it seemed against your self-interest, you had to answer questions honestly, avoid fleeing combat and toss coins to dirty hippie beggars. You couldn't just mime being a hero—you had to walk the walk, not just chop-the-orc.

Ultima V was also the first game to feature NPCs that had their own daily schedules, and *Ultima VI* offered the first virtual world with interactive objects that could be manipulated. Before the *U6 Project* team got hold of it, *Dungeon Siege* contained none of those features. It was relentlessly linear, had no interactive objects or meaningful NPC activity and was devoid of plot, let alone a morally sophisticated one. Yet somehow the *U6 Project* team managed to jam those distinct features into the *DS* engine. These core features and first-rate recreations of *Ultima VI's* cinematics are impressive enough, but *The U6 Project* does far more than replicate. NPCs, quests and locations have been significantly enhanced without overwriting the themes and storyline of the original game, more effectively conveying themes and moral nuances that were previously undernourished.

The remake was intended to repackage and augment a 20-year-old game using a modern 3D engine, but *Dungeon Siege's* engine is now a decade old. *The Ultima 6 Project* looks crude and its UI is cumbersome, so keep your expectations realistic. Tracking down the original *Dungeon Siege* or its stand-alone expansion, *Legends of Aranna*, can also be difficult, but you can cheaply nab a jewel case on Amazon.com.

> "The *Ultima* series has been blessed with superlative remakes."

A few years ago EA tried to get Obsidian to create a new *Ultima* game, but that project died in negotiations. Since EA owns BioWare it now has a capable internal RPG developer if it decides to try again, but management changes and the strength of BioWare's own franchises may have derailed any initiative to relaunch *Ultima*. Until that changes, *The Ultima 6 Project* at least offers a gratifying flashback to the most creatively ambitious RPG series. ■

It wouldn't be an *Ultima* without some gypsies.

TACTICAL ADVANTAGE

Troy Goodfellow blogs about strategy games at www.FlashofSteel.com and hosts the Three Moves Ahead podcast. He has no talent for writing fiction at all. Troy's time is being eaten by *Victoria II* and *StarCraft II*.

Jim Raynor takes no prisoners. He's a kick-ass hero who inspires his men with hard drinking, hard fighting and maybe some hard loving. The protagonist of the *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* campaign story is equal parts Mal Reynolds, Butch Cassidy and Ulysses S. Grant. Haunted by the loss of the woman he loves to a monstrous alien race he hates, Raynor's story is about vengeance and building a brighter future.

So what the hell is it doing in my strategy game?

A weird fit

Strategy games do not play well with authorial voice. Strategy is about analyzing a situation and then planning how to conquer it. No plan survives first contact with the enemy, so you leave room for adaptation once everything goes *kablooey*. Stories, however, have a beginning, a middle and an end. Characters develop, and PC games have primed us to expect a sudden but inevitable betrayal somewhere along the line.

StarCraft II's story campaign takes this separation even farther than expected. Every step is mapped out for you. It's not just that you are given objectives to complete the mission—the intro cutscene and in-mission clues often tell you exactly what you need to do to win the scenario and move the story forward. The inherent joy of strategy games is figuring out how to crack a nut, and Blizzard takes some of that joy away in service of narrative progress.

It is like being given the puzzle and solution all at once. Since RTS campaigns are generally designed to be puzzles, this can be disappointing to people who like solving them.

Changing things up

If an RTS campaign is to be memorable, the missions should follow more than the bog-standard build/harvest/slaughter pattern. Though this was the path cut by *Age of Empires* and *Warcraft II*, developers have since made strides in differentiating campaign gameplay from skirmish or online play.

Dawn of War II's campaign, for example, was more an RPG than a strategy game. You had battle tactics, but more importantly you had boss battles, scripted encounters, loot-gathering and ability progression for your small squad. It bears virtually no resemblance to the multiplayer game at all.

Some of the *StarCraft II* missions are very creative; an early mission has a day/night cycle and a zombie Zerg attack. The developers even give you units and upgrades that would be very helpful in multiplayer but are exclusive to the story, like mercenaries and bunker turrets. Even if the missions are variations on familiar RTS campaign themes, they are handled well enough to keep you eager for what's next.

Pulp fiction

If you want good writing, though, you are out of luck. The *StarCraft II* campaign has unlikeable characters saying boring things while they pretend that this space western is something important. As shiny and well-produced as the cutscenes are, there are too many of them, and too few are very good.

> **If you want good writing, you are out of luck.**

Why are there so few well-written RTS stories? In *StarCraft II* and games similar to it, all dialog leads to war and death, but the dialog never communicates anything about either. The story is never really integrated into the gameplay, so there is a disconnect between people talking and the killing.

But the story is so familiar, so predictable that it can't help but be welcoming to the hordes who have not played many strategy games since the first *StarCraft*. It's part of the mass appeal calculation, and even if you don't think that the campaign is revolutionary, it is large and varied.

It's still not strategy, properly understood, but it's a hook—and that in itself is a step forward for the story-based campaign. ■

Raynor's ugly mug will pop up every now and then to remind you how much you hate him.

FACE OFF

What's *StarCraft II*'s best race?

Zerg We are disgusting and many. We are the ants in your base's pants.

Protoss Quality over quantity, and laser beams totally rule. My life for Aiur!

As a youth, *PC Gamer* Senior Editor **Evan Lahti** kept a menagerie of worms, ants and cockroaches in mason jars for weekly fights.

PC Gamer Associate Editor **Josh Augustine** prefers his meals laser-fried and powered by pylons. He also thinks the Zerg are like totally gross, you know?

EVAN: Josh, this is absurd. This is like arguing what basketball team is better at layups, or which member of the Backstreet Boys is more adorable. What have we become, Josh?

JOSH: Every question must have an answer, Evan! (P.S.: The Los Angeles Lakers and A.J.)

EVAN: Guh. OK. At the time we're writing this, of the top 200 *StarCraft II* players in the United States, 88 play Terran, 69 play Protoss, and 37 play Zerg. The rest roll random. This isn't about "who's more popular" or "who would win in a fight." We're arguing about which race is more fun to play as.

JOSH: And it sure as hell isn't Terran.

EVAN: Damn right. Okay, so: Zerg. They're creepy, they're crawly. They have a lot of legs. What other game do you get to play as a messy force of nature?

JOSH: The better question is: why would you want to play as a messy force of nature? Their horrible phlegm-filled buildings are more likely to make me vomit than inspire fear.

EVAN: Hey, I've recorded at least six wins by disqualifying vomiting opponents. I really think that corrupted, biological aesthetic makes the Zerg more fun and fearsome—that grimy appearance forces commanders to get to know them. Zerg units and structures are harder to read—anyone can tell what a Terran Barracks or Protoss Photon Cannon does. That not only grants them a small combat advantage, but also allows Zergers a more satisfying gradual understanding of the race. Plus, we've got Banelings: acid-filled roly-polies.

JOSH: Banelings are pretty awesome—for my Collosi to incinerate! I mean, come on—what's cooler than a 12-story tall mecha-monstrosity melting waves of biological abominations slithering towards your base? I actually get excited when I see more Hydralisks scooting in to fight me. Bring it on, punies! Papa's got enough laser beams for all of you.

EVAN: Yeah, yeah. Back to that "force of nature" trait for a bit. Broadly, Zerg control armies while Protoss commanders point around expensive, valuable units. And I actually prefer that distinction: it lets me worry less about making mistakes because my units are a meaningless wave of biological material. Not that micromanagement isn't productive to every attack, but I don't have to fret about the individual placement of every Baneling or Roach as I would the positioning of a pricey Carrier, Colossus or Archon.

"I love that Protoss units aren't just about killing faster or more efficiently. They're about changing the battlefield itself to your advantage." —***Josh***

JOSH: You may be managing the movements of a lot of ugly mofos with the Zerg, but the Protoss is all about finesse. Sentry units, available early in the game, can create force-fields to disrupt troop movement or create clones of your own units to confuse the enemy. Stalkers teleport and Phoenixes lift enemies helplessly into the air. I love that Protoss units aren't just about killing faster or more efficiently. They're about changing the battlefield itself to your advantage. It feels like very high-level strategy.

EVAN: Zerg do that too, but even more directly: by corrupting the battlefield itself through the creep mechanic. Spreading silky, purple goo around the map is uniquely satisfying; I love using idle Overlords to vomit more creep and grow my dominion. It's like tile flooring, but made of evil DNA. ■

Lesser known than his lightning bolt, Zeus' power stomp is a big hit at parties.

DIABLO III

NEW INFO Real heroes don't shop locally; they bring their own vendor

READ ME
PUBLISHER
Activision Blizzard
DEVELOPER
Blizzard
LINK
www.diablo3.com

Diablo isn't really a quest to vanquish one or more of the three Greater Evils from the world of Sanctuary. It's a quest to acquire, identify and upgrade the best damn gear on the planet. I don't remember the names of the people I saved or the villains I ganked, but I can tell you what I was really after: a King's Sword of Haste, Godly Plate of the Whale, and two Emerald Rings of the Zodiac. It's the geek version of shoe shopping.

That was *Diablo I*, and it was pretty rudimentary. You found things or bought them, sometimes from the inexplicably well-armed, peg-legged child Wirt, who'd charge you just to glimpse his often useless wares. I don't know if *Diablo III* is the pinnacle of clicking on monsters to make them die, but it may well be the pinnacle of finding cool stuff, making cool stuff and upgrading cool stuff with other cool stuff to make increasingly cool stuff.

Blizzard doesn't want you to moonlight as a blacksmith, though. Your job is to kill things, so when there's crafting to be done, you pay other people to do it. After a quest to retrieve the five broken pieces of mad King Leoric's crown (remember him?), you need a blacksmith to put them together. You'll have to earn his services, but once you have, he's with you for the rest of the game.

Instead of selling useless items, you break them down into raw material to craft new armor.

Now, instead of selling every useless weapon you find for a pittance, you can break them down into composite materials using a "special artifact" which the interface currently refers to as BOX. Chucking trader trash into...BOX gives you one or two "common scraps" or "subtle essences." And these are the building blocks that your blacksmith needs to cook up weapon and armor plans. The simplest items he crafts only require a handful of raw materials, plus a fee of around 50 gold, but come with a few guaranteed magical attributes, and a few more that are entirely randomized. It has the compulsive delight of discovering the unknown, and the efficiency of turning useless junk into something you definitely want.

The smithy's other talent is to install sockets in any of your items, even the rare and magical ones. That lets you put gems in them to boost their damage or add to an attribute. Socketing was always one of the geekiest joys of *Diablo*, but whether you could do it with a given item was pretty much random. How much this costs isn't finalized, obviously, but the gold pincher in me flinched to see that socketing a basic shield currently sets you back over 24,000 gold. Let's assume that's a glitch.

Later, you'll meet a Mystic who can enchant your items to add magical properties to whatever their current stats are. He can also craft scrolls to give you one-off spells, potions for quick healing, magic weapons, charms, and spell runes to customize your skills.

And finally there's the Jeweller, or Horadric Cube on Legs as I like to call him. Like *Diablo II*'s mystery box, he can combine low quality gems to produce better ones with exaggerated stats. And he can also craft gems, rings and amulets from raw materials.

I'm looking forward to coming back to town with a sack of smashed up garbage, getting the Blacksmith to make me a weapon with it and put in sockets, the Jeweler to forge a gem or two to fill them, and the Mystic to enchant the whole thing just in case six or seven killer bonuses aren't enough.

The quality of product each of these guys can produce is limited by their own skills and equipment. But all you need to increase those is, again, raw materials. Instead of having the smithy make you a new belt, let him experiment on a few bits of wood or metal. He'll ruin them, but he'll learn something doing it, increasing his training bar. When it's full, he and his shop glow in a painfully bright light and then explode in a shower of angel dust. They're reborn slightly better; a minor laser light show to celebrate the coming of new wares. Who says shopping isn't fun? ■

Tom Francis

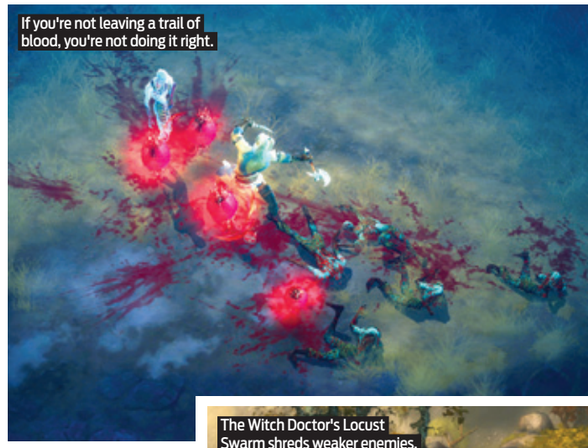
Release 2011

Hellish fiends look better (and grosser) than ever.

Zombies or ghosts? Just keep hitting 'em 'til they fall.

The more enemies, the more loot. Bring 'em on.

Invest in your crafter's training to unlock powerful recipes.



If you're not leaving a trail of blood, you're not doing it right.

The Witch Doctor's Locust Swarm shreds weaker enemies.

I demand satisfaction. *Cyber*-satisfaction.

DEUS EX HUMAN REVOLUTION

NEW INFO One goal, three different approaches. It's **DEUS EX** all right.

Eidos Montreal's recent *Deus Ex* presentation had a clear agenda: to prove that its game is worthy of the *Deus Ex* name. So they showed one scenario—hero Adam Jensen's retrieval of a neural implant from a corpse locked deep in a police station—solved three different ways.

The first approach is all about direct conflict. Adam enters the police station, but his way is blocked by cops. He pulls a gun, taking down two of them before diving for cover behind a photocopier. A glowing outline appears around it, and around a number of other nearby objects. What the...? Ah, a strength augmentation has been activated. Adam picks the photocopier up, and moves it to a better position. This is already better than most cover-based shooters: you decide where the cover is. From his new position, Adam takes down two policemen, leaning out from behind the copier when he can, and blind-firing when it gets hairy.

With his targets down, he emerges, taking out a guard overlooking a room full of officers. Another aug, essentially a wall-hack, shows Adam where everyone is. He makes his way to the floor below,

The police station lights up, and with it outlines of every soul in a neck-snappable radius.

finds cover and opens fire.

A cop has found his own cover: a quick dip into the menu and Adam adds an explosive bullet mod to his hand-cannon. He fires at the wall behind the sheltering cop and the back-blast takes him out. The others unlucky enough to get in the way of the explosive rounds pinwheel about the station. Adam changes to a non-lethal gun: it still propels cops through the air, but this way you're not left with their orphaned children on your conscience.

At the locked morgue door he pops opens his inventory and combines a grenade with a "mine template." His übered-up mine blows the door down. After killing the morgue attendant it's back to the start for the "social" run.

That means Adam using his husky voice to grumble his way into the police station. Wayne, the cop at the front desk, is an old colleague: the two were once given the order to shoot an augmented child, which Adam refused but Wayne carried out. Now he's resentful of Adam, who he thinks has risen while he's been stuck at a desk job. Conversational choices are made from a wheel: in this case, "crush," "absolve" or "plead," and despite my psychic begging, Adam goes with the "absolve" option over "crush." It's a fair decision: Wayne's clearly broken over his life choices, and Adam's forgiveness is something he needed. He also looks like the saddest man alive. I'm not sure I could hit the "crush" button on the human equivalent of a limping kitten.

In any case, for the purposes of this demo things have been simplified: for more complex conversations Adam will use augs to monitor heartbeat and sweat levels. Winning the conversation leaves Adam free to explore the station—a good way to collect additional information. He casually strolls into the morgue through the area he shot up previously. This time he talks to the morgue attendant.

The third option is the stealthy approach. It's the most augmentation-heavy playthrough. Adam slips around the side of the building, ducking behind a patrol and then heading for a high chain link fence. He moves a dumpster using the strength aug, jumps on it and over the fence. He climbs a fire escape to a locked door: it requires a higher hacking skill than he has.

Adam looks at his stats. You can select body parts to enhance, and Adam has spare XP. He boosts his cranial slot, and now he's smart enough to hack the door. Cue an *Uplink*-style minigame, where you have to access a node before you're traced.

We're inside, and Adam's on the third floor. He uses the wall-hack aug again. The police station lights up, and with it outlines of every soul in a neck-snappable radius. Someone is patrolling a balcony. Adam edges close to him, dodging from cover to cover, staying crouched down. When two more cops appear, he activates a cloaking device and crawls past them.

Down in the bowels of the station a cop guards a security door. Adam avoids him, sneaking into a vent that leads to a vantage point above two other guards. But there's a vent cover, and stealth requires not kicking clanging squares of metal, so he backs off and returns to the lone guard. As luck would have it he's now standing with his back to the open vent. Adam snaps his neck. The doors only open in the presence of a recognized guard, but it doesn't matter if they're neck-snapped and being dragged by the ankle. Once through the doors, Adam rummages through the cop's pockets, finding a PDA with the morgue door code on it. He's in. Again.

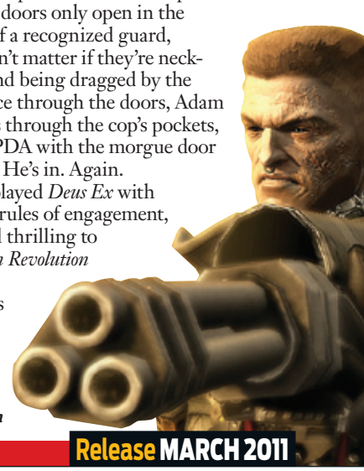
I never played *Deus Ex* with such rigid rules of engagement, but it's still thrilling to see *Human Revolution* mirror the capabilities of its predecessors this way. ■

Craig Pearson

Is your cover in an awkward position? You can move it.

Pondering the killing options.

The cities feel busy and alive.



Release MARCH 2011

READ ME
PUBLISHER Square Enix
DEVELOPER Eidos Montreal
LINK www.deusex.com

The Hiver ships look like armored locusts.

SWORD OF THE STARS II

FIRST LOOK *The Lords of Winter* strives for emergent storytelling within strategy

For Martin Cirulis, CEO and design lead at Kerberos Productions, narrow, cliché thinking keeps strategy games from doing more with their story narratives.

"The conflict between storytelling and open gameplay only exists in the most literal interpretations of the word 'story,'" he says. Cirulis is convinced that a genuine, authorial voice can work alongside the emergent narrative you find in a 4X game like *Sword of the Stars*. He has no patience for mission-based campaigns that do not give the player room to discover things on his own. Space battles, he insists, shouldn't be about simply watching health bars deplete on a fleet of battlecruisers—he's adamant that *Sword of the Stars II: Lords of Winter* won't be just another 4X space-conquest game.

The first game in the series was about first contact—Earthlings realizing that the universe is a large and dangerous place. But gaining that foothold in space was only the first step, says Cirulis. "*SotS2* will be the story of empire, and the struggle to preserve everything you have fought so hard for."

The big baddies this time around are the Suul'ka, also known as the Lords of Winter, a terrifying hostile race that has eliminated or enslaved many other civilizations, but whose precise appearance remains a mystery. Through missions and emergent storytelling, you will uncover their mystery and counter their menace.

As is appropriate for a maturing empire like yours, *SotS2*'s mechanics have evolved. Combat is no longer just about hitting precise targets on enemy ships—you'll control fewer ships this time out, but you'll have better control over them. For example, you'll be able to rotate a wounded ship so that its soft underbelly is safe from enemy fire.

In a nod to how devoted the *SotS* series fans are to the universe and its sense of discovery, the in-game encyclopedia will constantly update and allow you to make your own notes as you piece the mystery of the Suul'ka together. Fan feedback has been crucial in development, Cirulis says, so giving them something to customize (and optionally share with others) makes sense. "Without the dedication of our amazing fan base, I doubt *SotS2* would ever have come into being," he says. Thanks, fans! ■

Troy Goodfellow

READ ME

PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive

DEVELOPER Kerberos Productions

LINK http://bit.ly/sots2

Release Q2 2011

Release Meter

We love a good LAN party, and 2011 is going to be filled with LAN-friendly games. *Crysis 2*, *Battlefield 3*, *Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad*, *Portal 2*, *Monaco*, *Torchlight II*, *Dungeon Siege III* and *Darkspore* are all ripe for side-by-side or same-room play. We'll be sure to work them all into rotation of our excellent *PC Gamer* servers—you can find our server list in the Send section.

Q4 2010	
Arcania: Gothic IV	DreamCatcher
Battlestar Galactica Online	Bigpoint
Call of Duty: Black Ops	Activision
DC Universe Online	Sony Online
DeathSpank	Hothead
Fallout: New Vegas	Bethesda
LEGO Universe	Warner Bros.
Lionheart: King's Crusade	Paradox
Medal of Honor	EA
Rage	Bethesda
Subversion	Introversion
Two Worlds II	SouthPeak
World of Tanks	Wargaming.net
World of Warcraft: Cataclysm	Blizzard

2011	
Assassin's Creed Brotherhood	Ubisoft
Alice: Madness Returns	EA
Batman: Arkham City	Eidos
Battlefield 3	EA
Crysis 2	EA
Darkspore	EA
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	Square Enix
Diablo III	Blizzard
Dragon Age 2	EA
Driver: San Francisco	Ubisoft
Duke Nukem Forever	2K Games
Dungeons	Kalypso
Dungeon Siege III	Square Enix
Frozen Synapse	Mode7 Games
Homefront	THQ
Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	Ubisoft
Guild Wars 2	NCSoft
Jagged Alliance 3	Bit-Composer
Kings and Castles	TBD
Mass Effect 3	EA
MechWarrior	TBD
Monaco	TBD
Portal 2	Valve
Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad	TBD
Rock of Ages	Atlus
Shogun II: Total War	SEGA
Space Marine	THQ
StarCraft II: Heart of The Swarm	Blizzard
Star Wars: The Old Republic	EA
Stronghold 3	SouthPeak
Sword of the Stars II	Paradox
Torchlight II	Runic Games
XCOM	2K Games

Guild Wars 2

Nothing is sacred. The developers at ArenaNet are tossing out ye olde MMO rules to make it easier than ever to team up with friends and succeed together, thanks to *Guild Wars 2*'s groundbreaking world events and mind-blowing class design.

by Josh Augustine

In 2005, *Guild Wars* busted into the MMO scene with a heretical proposition: that players could have a quality, triple-A online experience without paying a monthly subscription fee. But what seemed absurd then appears brilliant in retrospect—ArenaNet's bold, beautifully realized and susbcriptionless MMO attracted hardcores and curious outsiders alike and has sold over six and a half million copies to date. And five years later, *Guild Wars 2* looks ready to shake up the genre once again. But this time around, instead of upending business models (*GW2* will also be a boxed game with no subscription), ArenaNet wants to revolutionize the way players work and adventure together.

Haves and have-nots

The traditional model for grouping in MMOs relies on three roles for players to fill: healer, tank, and DPS (damage dealers). Players design their characters to fulfill one of these roles and rarely deviate from it while in a group. If you're the healer, for example, you wouldn't expect to stop healing until the dungeon is cleared. This model has been in place since the birth of grouping in MMOs, and very few games have seen success when they attempt to break away from it. Would ArenaNet dare desecrate this holy trinity—the most sacred relic of MMO-land? You bet your Charr they would.

Now, before defenders of the status quo begin screaming blasphemy and rioting in the streets, let me reassure you—ArenaNet isn't on a crusade to destroy the healer-tank-DPS tradition entirely. Instead, it intends to transform it into something even more accessible and enjoyable. As Lead Game Designer Eric Flannum explains it, "We don't want players to take on strict roles, but there are still roles that need to be fulfilled in combat…Every character is versatile, so it's up to you to recognize what other players are doing, what the situation is, and react to it." The developers still want players to tank enemies, restore health to their friends and tear through enemy flesh like tissue paper as they always have in MMOs. The big change is that they want each player to do *all* of those things, as the situation warrants.

www.pcgamer.com
www.pcgamer.com

Purple bubble lady vs. gross, two-headed Orc. We'll go with the lady.

Warriors lead the charge into battle and rally the troops behind them.

Definitive proof that cats are superior to dogs. Sorry, Scooby.

Time to kill? Switching to dual axes will definitely help.

Think on your toes

It's all about flexibility. Groups will still want someone to run into the thick of things and take the brunt of enemy aggression, but why should that player be locked into that role at all times? Why can't a gun-toting Charr pull out a mace and shield when he sees his friends in trouble and protect them? Why can't a magic-blasting Sylvari use her powers to heal her friends when that's what's needed most? In *Guild Wars 2*, they can.

But it's not *all* loosey-goosey—players still choose a definitive class when they create their character. The four announced classes so far are Warrior, Elementalist, Ranger and Necromancer—a healthy balance of the usual class archetypes (only Monk and Mesmer haven't been confirmed from the first game to return).

Choose your weapon

Unlike the original game—where players could cherry-pick skills from a massive pool of options—the skills that you have on your bar in *GW2* are now determined by your class and the weapons you have equipped.

A warrior who equips a shield will see two tanking skills appear on his bar, for example, and if he equips a mace in his main hand, he'll be given three additional skills to stun and attack his opponents. Each player will have 10 skills on their bar: the first three determined by what's in their main hand, the next two determined by what's in their off hand (a two-handed weapon will determine all five), and the last five skills will be chosen by the player within categories—one self-healing skill, three utility skills, and one elite skill, which is very powerful but has a long cooldown.

Weapon restrictions will follow common sense logic—Elementalists won't be able to equip shields (although Flannum told me that he ran a five-man group filled with Elementalists that fared pretty well in dungeons, such as the two revealed for the first time ever later in this feature), and different classes will utilize the same type of weapon differently. For example, both the Warrior and the Ranger can equip a longbow, but the Warrior will use it for spray-and-pray AoE attacks while the Ranger will utilize it more elegantly as a long-range, single-target sniping weapon.

Out of combat, players can mix and match weapon sets to their heart's content, but before going into battle, they'll need to pick two sets of weapons that they'll be able to switch between freely during combat. The one exception is the Elementalist, who can't swap weapons during combat, but accomplishes the same thing by swapping between his or her four attunements (fire, earth, water, and air).

Controlled chaos

Flannum describes his vision for the game's combat as "controlled chaos fun," adding that "in MMOs, combat gets really fun when things go wrong. When the tank goes down and you have to yell at the off-tank to grab the boss's attention—that's when things get exciting.

Our combat makes that the constant state of things, so you're always in an exciting situation…but we try to over-communicate visually what's happening around you, so you always know what's going on and it's not just mass chaos." It sounds good to us, but can they pull it off effectively?

Meet the Necromancer

Master of minions, lord of destruction, dirty little life-leecher—the Necromancer class is known for many things, but there is one constant among them all: these dark casters revel in death. We sat down with the developers to talk how they'll be using their wicked magic to bring on the pain in *Guild Wars 2*.

How do *you* want to play a Necromancer?

A guide to what abilities the different weapons will grant to a Necromancer

Weapon	Hand Slot	Type of Abilities
Staff	Two hands	Long range support
Scepter	Main hand	Damage-over-time spells
Axe	Main hand	Lots of raw damage at medium range
Dagger	Main hand	Short range, life-stealing powers
Dagger	Off hand	Support allies
Focus	Off hand	Heavy damage ranged attacks
Warhorn	Off hand	Short range AoE attacks

Mind games
A Necromancer knows that fear is a powerful weapon, and wields it deftly to crush her enemies. In game terms, it's a removable buff that causes the victim to run directly away from the Necromancer—a mechanic that's certain to let Necromancers have endless fun running enemies into all sorts of hazards. Why kill your enemies when you can make them kill themselves?

Helping hands
Two hands are never enough. Luckily, you can command the corpses under the earth to reach out and catch the heels of your pursuant to slow them down and buy you some time.

Unholy ground
Another distinctive mechanic of Necromancers is marks, desecrations drawn on the ground that are capable of granting powerful boons to allies or crippling hexes to enemies. Marks can be triggered by the Necromancer or will automatically trigger after a set period of time. Two have been confirmed so far: one that heals allies and another that increases minions' damage.

The right minion for the job

Hurting? **Blood fiends** heal you or allies.

Crowded? Explode a **bone minion** to make space.

Being followed? **Bone fiends** immobilize enemies.

Feeling lazy? Let your **Shadow fiend** teleport there.

This isn't a render; we fought this boss in a demon-infested swamp.

Embracing the madness

I got to experience this "controlled chaos" firsthand during my playtime at ArenaNet's HQ near Seattle, Washington. I was an Elementalist teamed up with an assortment of the four available classes as my allies. We ventured into a dark, foreboding swamp to take on The Shadow Behemoth, and let me assure you, the 12 story-tall demon certainly lived up to its name. Its health was split between its head and two massive, shadowy hands capable of rocking the earth beneath us, knocking us down.

We knew this boss would take coordination, and although none of us had chosen to be a "tank" or "healer" when making our character, it didn't take long for the familiar shouts of "OK, I'll tank him" and "I've got your back; I'll heal you!" were shouted across the room as the warriors pulled out shields and the Elementalists switched to their water attunement, granting them healing abilities.

But I'm not the healing type, so I stuck with my dual-dagger fire setup which gave me powerful AoE skills. I had a ton of fun swapping between my attunements to fill different roles: I'd jump to my water attunement to freeze a lesser demon harassing our healers, then throw down a firewall in front of our Rangers so that their arrows caught fire en route to the boss (player abilities can combine together in hundreds of different, logical ways to produce new, unique effects), and blasted the boss's face with a few fireballs of my own whenever I had some spare time.

What now?

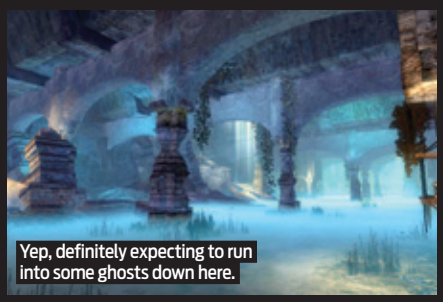
It was going well—and then our healer died. In almost any other MMO, this would be a wipe; we'd all be dead. But we're not so helpless in *GW2*. Our fallen healer is still casting spells at nearby enemies, *Left 4 Dead*-style.

Your healer just went down. What do you do?

The Shatterer was a lot more difficult—we died many, many times.

The classiest dungeon you'll ever have the pleasure of looting.

The dungeons' settings range from familiar to terrifying.



Yep, definitely expecting to run into some ghosts down here.

Meet the Heroes

"Shut your talk-hole, bookah. Every time you open it, you drip stupid all over my floor."

The greatest adventuring team of all time has broken up after an unknown, horrible disaster and it's the player's job to find out what happened and convince them to get back together to defend the world once more. The guild included (left to right) Caithe, a nature-aligned Sylvari seeking truth; Rytlock, a ruthless and cunning commander of the Charr; Logan, a righteous, loyal defender of the Seraph throne; Eir, a wandering Norn tactician that relies on getting inside the minds of her enemies; and Zojja, a loud-mouthed, cocky inventor. They're a very odd combination, but their varied strengths and backgrounds ensured that they always had the tools and experience to conquer anything that came their way.

Her Grasping Earth spell attacks and slows a nearby enemy. If she can kill someone within 30 seconds, she'll pop back up to her feet and keep fighting (the time limit is drastically reduced if she's downed repeatedly or continues to take damage).

We all pitch in to help our healer kill the nearby swamp demon and she's revived; but now the tank has fallen. No worries—I pop Mist Form, which makes me temporarily invulnerable, sprint to the tank and revive him. He jumps to his feet, the healer caps off his health, and we're back in business.

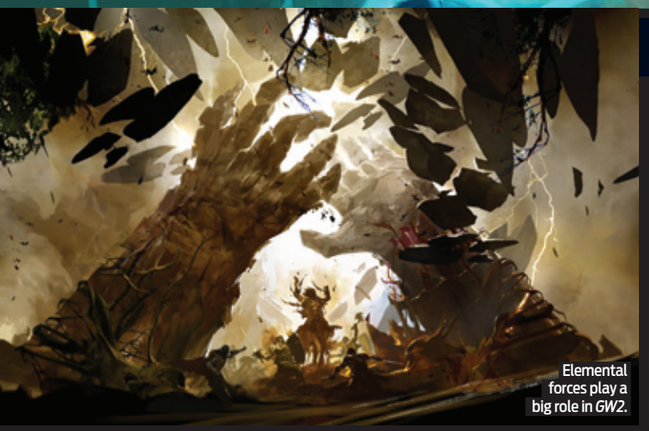
In *GW2*, anyone is able to revive another player as an innate interaction ("We wanted lots of opportunity for things to not only go wrong, but for players to reverse what went wrong," explains Flannum), which led to some pretty miraculous daisy-chaining of resurrections that brought our team back from the brink of disaster to finally defeating the giant swamp boss after 10 minutes of intense, fast-paced action that kept us thinking on our toes the entire time.

Environmental weapons offer another great way to mix things up mid-combat: pick up a big rock on the ground and your skills are replaced with ones that let you hurl the boulder at enemies or bash them with it up close.

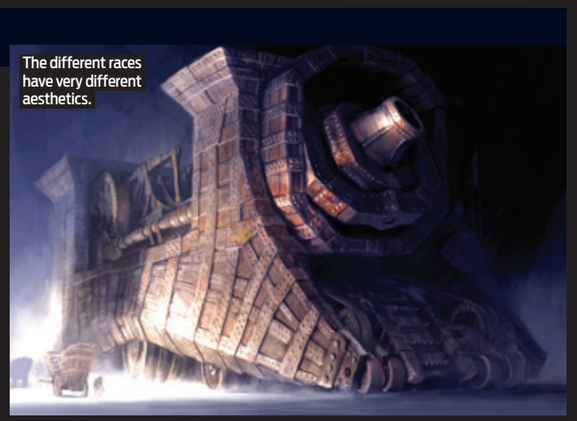
Unlike some MMOs, there's no way that successful raiders in *GW2* will be spamming one attack over and over—the controlled chaos keeps combat dynamic and exciting and generates great stories to brag and laugh about afterwards.

Organization can be fun too

The first time you enter a dungeon (a new dungeon will be available roughly every 10 levels, with additional ones at end-game), you'll enter into its Story Mode, which focuses around one or more members of the famous adventuring guild Destiny's Edge (see the boxout to the left for more details). For some unknown reason this legendary team has broken up, and your job is to get the band back together.



Elemental forces play a big role in *GW2*.



The different races have very different aesthetics.

One of the dungeons has you taking on huge mechanical monsters.

Thankfully, you won't have to sit them all down and talk about their feelings—dungeons are all about fighting (even one that starts out as a party in a mansion quickly turns to combat). The first time you play a dungeon, you'll play through its Story Mode, where one or two members of Destiny's Edge show up as friendly NPCs to drive the story forward. These stories will be distinct from your character's own personal story, although you play as your character in both.

Beating a dungeon's Story Mode will unlock its Explorable Mode, which tells varied follow-up stories in that same area, unrelated to Destiny's Edge. This mode is designed to be extremely repeatable, and while not random, will have multiple paths that cause different scenarios and enemies to appear. Lead Content Designer Johanson tells me "[We] don't want players to get into a pattern where they can easily predict what's coming up next. We want it to be a surprise to keep it lively and fresh for players." To that end, there will be a lot of secret events hidden within the dungeons for players to discover.

Let's get specific

That's fine in theory, but how does it work in practice? Let's look at Sorrow's Embrace, a level 60-70 dungeon revealed here for the first time. Sorrow's Embrace is a hideout for the Dredge, a mole-like race that used to be enslaved by the Dwarves, but is now free. In Story Mode, you uncover that the Dredge leaders have betrayed their people and sold them to slavery to the Seraph, and fight off the enslavers. In Explorable Mode, you aid the Dredge workers who are now planning a revolt against their corrupt leaders. We love how this setup makes your actions in Story Mode feel consequential. That big bad boss you drove out isn't here the second time around—you're dealing with the fallout of the actions you took in Story Mode.

You're on your own in Explorable Mode, though—the Destiny's Edge heroes are only in the Story Mode and the hirable henchmen NPCs from *Guild Wars*' dungeons will not be returning in the sequel. However, the developers assured me that it would be easier than ever to find players to group with.

Something for the effort

ArenaNet is once again going against the flow when it comes to dungeon rewards: every time you run a dungeon, you are guaranteed to get a piece of armor meant for your class via a token system. The devs don't want to force players to do dungeons if they don't want to (they're designed for players who want the thrill of "overcoming difficult content with teamwork," according to Johanson). So while the dungeon sets will look awesome—since each dungeon offers a matching set of gear for each armor type that's themed to that particular dungeon—the stats will be equivalent of those on equal-level gear earned via other methods in the game, such as world events, personal story, PvP and mini-games.

During my playthrough, I found that a healthy balance of all the different types of content came naturally. A personal story quest sent me to a castle in the open world, which I found under siege by Centaurs as a part of a world event. So a few other players around the area and I got to know each other over some horsemen-slaughtering before grouping up and adventuring together for awhile. I love how easy and rewarding it was to group up with other players and make friends, but you don't have to—*Guild Wars 2* looks like it has rewarding and refreshing gameplay for all the different types of players, from lone wolf to compulsive raider. ■

Shaemoor Garrison

I was minding my own business, completing my quests, when Centaurs suddenly attacked!

1

2

3

4

1 I protect the civilians in the keep. 2 The Centaurs are chased out of the keep back to their camp. 3 They regroup and fight back, but we keep pressing. 4 They summon a giant elemental god. 5 We wet our pants.

NEW DUNGEON REVEAL!

Ascalon Catacombs

The bare facts of the spookiest dungeon in *GW2*

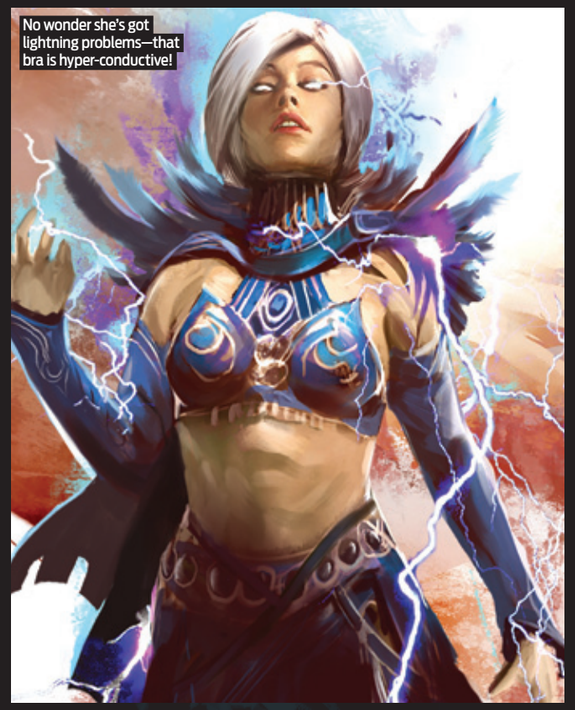
THE LEVEL RANGE: 30-40

THE PLOT: The warrior spirits in the Ascalon Catacombs have become restless. Your group must venture in to quell the threat before they surge out into the world.

THE HEROES: Rytlock ventures with your party and Norn tactician Eir makes a cameo appearance.

THE BOSSES: Players will recognize most bosses as spirits of profession trainers in the first game. Master Ranger Nente can teleport and shoot waves of arrows that cover part of the room, forcing you to hide behind objects in the environment. Warmaster Grast smashes players and the environment with his oversized, half-ghost hammer. Necromancer Munne and King Adelmen, the final boss, must also be defeated.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEAPONS: You can build traps to lure enemies into or pick up the scattered rubble as Warmaster Grast smashes the environment to attack with.



No wonder she's got lightning problems—that bra is hyper-conductive!

www.pcgamer.com

www.pcgamer.com

BEYOND THE SEA

Follow **BIOSHOCK INFINITE**'s flight of fancy to a city in the sky ***by Craig Pearson***

RELEASE 2012

My first glimpse of Colombia, the floating city where Irrational has set its follow-up to *BioShock*, is of a sneering caricature of a Mexican face, reminiscent of racist US propaganda from the turn of the last century. Then the camera pans to a similarly twisted Asian face. Finally, it pulls back to reveal that we're looking at a mural of a heroic George Washington, chin up, perfectly lit, surrounded by these sketchily drawn foreigners. Below it, the words "It Is Our Holy Duty to Guard Against The Foreign Hordes."

Colombia is more than just a city: it's a floating World's Fair, traveling from country to country on vast hot air balloons, a shining example of American endeavor. Beautiful colonial buildings

Elizabeth, the girl you're here to rescue.

What happens when they flush the toilet?

hang in the void, tethered to each other by travel rails, parting clouds as they glide. It looks peaceful, but it's a facade. Following an unexplained international incident, Colombia's true nature is revealed. As Irrational's Creative Director Ken Levine puts it: "it's a Death Star." Colombia disappears up into the sky, and becomes a twisted symbol of what it once was. Years pass, countries fear its arrival, but it remains hidden from public view. Colombia is a city cut off from the world, a place where an idea has festered, infecting the population. Here, American exceptionalism has twisted into evangelical xenophobia.

It's 1912, years after the city vanished above the clouds. You're Booker DeWitt, a disgraced former Pinkerton Agent (19th century detectives and skull crushers). He's been asked to find a missing woman, Elizabeth. She's in the sky. She's on Colombia.

Same but different

At the game's announcement event in New York, I asked Ken Levine how all this fits into an Ayn Randian world of Big Daddies, crushing fathoms of water and notions of free will. How can this possibly be the same universe that the original *BioShock* was set in?

"There are two things we think are essential to a *BioShock* game," he said. "Put away all the things with Splicers and Little

Colombia is a city cut off from the world, a place where an idea has festered.

Sisters and all these...they're important, and in Rapture they were important to *BioShock*, but they weren't the center. The center was being in a world that is amazing and weird and strange and fantastical, but also grounded in the human experience and believable, even though it's fantastical. And exploring that world.

"And the second thing is having a huge suite of tools and a huge range of problems coming at you, and you determining how to deal with these problems with your set of tools. To make a game and have those things—and we weren't done with those ideas—and to put it in another city and not have it be a *BioShock* game would not be, I think, really honest.

"It *is* a *BioShock* game. *BioShock* has never been about Rapture, it's been about those two core ideas."

So while there are plasmid-like powers and metallic, groaning beasties to fight, *Infinite* is looking like a clean slate on which to write "screw everyone" over and over and over again.

The demonstration continues. A robot horse drags a cart along a cobbled street, passing Booker.

Irrational's new tech allows every building to float independently. A colonial building, gorgeously white, on top of an airbag, pitches forwards, thumping into the road. The bell on top clangs to the ground, swinging towards Booker. Colombia is broken.

Booker continues through the streets, passing a building engulfed in flames. A woman sweeps in the doorway, framed by the fire. Colombia is all the creepier for setting scenes like this in bright daylight. Ken Levine's touchpoints, he says, are an imaginary July 4th, 1900, with hopeful, perfect blue skies, and the films *Blue Velvet* and *The Shining*.

The first dead body I see is a horse still attached to its cart, slumped on the ground and being eaten by flies. The feeling here is that, once again, the infrastructure has collapsed and insanity is taking hold. Not as badly as in Rapture, not yet, but that kind of breakdown is on its way.

As Booker steps over the horse, a voice swells from a garden. "The needs of our great city of Colombia must come before the desire of any *foreigner*; whether they be enemy or friend. For I have looked into the future and one path is filled with amity and gold, and the other is fraught with the perils of a hostile and alien world."

Booker enters the garden. He passes a man sitting on a bench, surrounded by birds, and approaches the speaker. This is Mr. Saltonstall. He's preaching to no one, dressed in a suit that looks like it was made out of the American flag, surrounded by placards warning about the theft of your guns.

Is Saltonstall *BioShock Infinite*'s caricature of the recent Tea Party movement in America? Not quite, according to Levine: "Those are not new movements in this country, those are recurring movements in this country and we started work on this before those things happened.

A remarkable world of floating buildings, teetering on dirigibles.

Unsurprisingly, because these things come around every X number of years, you have the nativist movements, you have second amendment movements, you have things that are often combined; it's very, very common, and it occurs with some frequency."

Sending tweets

When Booker DeWitt grabs one of Saltonstall's weapons, it all goes a bit *BioShock*: Saltonstall's face glitches and flickers, his eyes glow and he sets his henchman, Charles, on DeWitt. Charles is the guy surrounded by birds. He launches a murder of crows at Booker, as Saltonstall leaps up and hooks onto one of Colombia's travel rails, which whisks him away. From amid the diving black cloud of birds, Booker manages to snipe Charles, who falls over the edge of the garden. Booker peers over the wall: the body has caught on a platform below. He uses his telekinesis power on it, and a bottle Charles was carrying swooshes towards him. Drinking it gives him his foe's power over birds.

Saltonstall's invective echoes through the floating city, and Booker turns to look for him, affording me a wider glimpse of Colombia in the process. The buildings move gently in the breeze, cutting through clouds. Below is the checkerboard pattern of fields—a long, long way below. I want Booker to spend more time admiring the view, so that I can take in the remarkable world of floating buildings, teetering on dirigibles, and all moving independently of each other. But Saltonstall's escape, while cowardly, was also tactical. He's retreated to a big-ass cannon.

There's a distant *crump*, mixed in with Saltonstall's threats, and a flaming ball arcs over the serene view. It crashes down near DeWitt, who grabs a hook on a travel rail. He's taking the kamikaze approach of fighting someone with a giant gun: head towards them. He's whizzed along the track

PARK LIFE A snapshot of Colombia's cheery, sunny and unsettling world

Bird man
From what I've seen of Colombia's people, the genetic modification here won't lead to the nasty, torn up Splicers of the original *BioShock*.

Sky city
Every building in Colombia will move independently. The tech has taken Irrational years to develop, but the effect of seeing a city of buildings drifting in the sky is worth it.

A murder of crows
These birds are a weapon, controlled psychically by Charlie here. When he's killed, Booker gains control over his dark flock.

The Patriot Act
American exceptionalism has festered. The "They" in Saltonstall's placards refers to any foreigner.

Mr. Saltonstall, about to hook onto a travel rail.

through the floating city, dangling with one arm free. Another of Saltonstall's men heads towards him, hanging from another rail. DeWitt swings a wrench at him and whacks him off the rail. He ragdolls into a building and drops out of the city altogether; I suspect a lot of people will die as victims of Colombia's sky-high locale.

Booker swoops through a Parisian floating archway and lands near Saltonstall. The crazed political preacher turns and fires again, but Booker escapes into a nearby pub. Whereas everyone was against you in Rapture, things aren't so clear cut in Colombia. The pub patrons, seemingly oblivious to the concussive cannon shots outside, ignore Booker's presence at first, at least until more of Saltonstall's men arrive and attack. There are way more of them than you'd get attacking you in Rapture, but this is tempered by Booker being able to dual-wield his powers and weapons. He plucks a shotgun from one attacker, cocks it and fires it mid-air before it even reaches his hands. When he does grab it, he can blast away while also firing electrical bolts and unleashing his crows to make an escape. He emerges onto the street, and Saltonstall is waiting. With a gun.

Saltonstall fires, nearly point blank. Booker grabs the projectile out of the air with his telekinesis and fires it back, sprinting away without looking to see if Saltonstall survived.

Still fleeing, Booker is forced to duck behind a train of wooden containers. He seems overwhelmed and I'm starting to wonder if the game is unbalanced, when Elizabeth, the woman Booker has been sent to rescue, appears.

She's been trapped on Colombia since

Booker spins around: settling on top of a nearby building is gigantic, bird-like robot.

her childhood. It's not explained why you're there to get her, but it's clear her powers are a factor. As Booker cowers behind the train, she creates a localized storm above his pursuers—the blue sky disappears and the day darkens. "Hit it," she shouts, and Booker zaps the cloud with a bolt of electricity, launching the 15 men into the air, scorching them all with a hair-raising blast of crackly power.

Elizabeth is present in combat to provide a different way of fighting. She can use her powers to change the flow of a battle, although you'll be free to ignore her if you have a different plan.

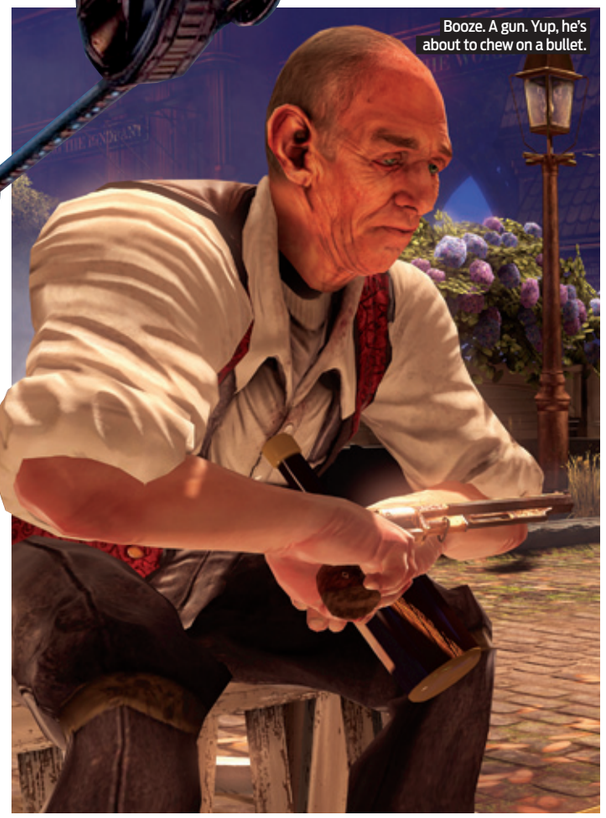
She's clearly a useful ally to have: as Saltonstall's men keep coming she shows off another power. She sweeps her arms in a wide arc, the tops pop off the little train carts, and every metal object in them rises up and welds together with a satisfying *clang*. She holds the ball above her head and Booker hurls it at his enemies with his telekinesis. It wipes them out.

Dapper Dan

Rest? Recover? There's no post-fight lull. A ratcheting, cranking noise breaks the briefest respite you could hope for. A Big Daddy has arrived. Except this oversized, half-man, half-robot can't be a Big Daddy. It's similar to the lumbering giants of the deep, but it's something else, and currently labelled "Alpha." It looks like an old-time barber gone wrong; on top of an exaggerated, frighteningly powerful body that houses a beating heart in a glass dome, there's a slightly confused, moustachioed face with pomaded hair. He looks sad, and Levine later confirms he wanted the creature to be crying during the attack. However sad he is, it's not enough for me to feel bad for him. Standing on the bridge Booker and Elizabeth were trying to flee across, he picks up a *horse* and tosses the whinnying thing at them. It misses, and Booker and Elizabeth team up again. She focuses her power on the bridge's overhead structure; it glows and weakens. Booker zaps it and it collapses onto the bridge, crashing right through it, catching the Alpha and dragging him over the edge.

Elizabeth collapses, bleeding from the nose. Booker says: "That was the one that was chasing you?"

"No, that wasn't the one." She's staring over Booker's shoulder.



Booze. A gun. Yup, he's about to chew on a bullet.

OK, OK, it was the wrong time to ask you out.

Try not to look down.

NO COMMENT FIVE QUESTIONS LEVINE WAS TOO SMART TO ANSWER

ANY MORE BIG DADDIES?
1 During the trailer *(http://bit.ly/cbYb6J)*, what looks like a Big Daddy is just a diver holding a giant conch shell. Irrational thought it was funny to tease the viewers.

BOOKER IS GARRETT?
2 I made a note to ask the devs if Booker was played by Stephen Russell, the voice of Levine's *Thief* protagonist. They wouldn't tell me. (It's so him.)

HOW DID BOOKER GET HIS POWERS?
3 Elizabeth is the likely source. Colombia is violently opposed to her rescue. It's probable that she's shared her powers with Booker to help her escape.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?
4 Levine refuses to explain the meaning behind choosing "*Infinite*," instead stating that it would be clear to those who finished the game.

DID THAT PICTURE CHANGE?
5 During the pub fight a painting clearly changed its image from a landscape to a man's face. Who is it, and how did it happen? Ken's not saying.

There's a *huge* metallic *clunk*. Booker spins around—settling on top of a nearby building is a gigantic, bird-like robot. *That's* what was chasing her. It screams and the demo ends.

I feel breathless. My initial worries about the linearity of what was shown are dismissed by Ken Levine. This was a brief taste, only 10 minutes of a game so unfinished that he's still writing it.

"You noticed we're not talking about a ton of characters in the game. Some of them are evolving; some of them are yet to be created. Like, when I first started showing *BioShock* there was no Anna Culpepper, there was no Dr. Steinman, they didn't exist when I showed that first demo. They evolved. Though I had a medical level, I didn't know who the doctor was on that level, I didn't know that he was going to be, you know, putting up these paintings of faces that he was transforming, or exactly the nature of his insanity. That's all evolved."

That medical center sequence from the original *BioShock* is *BioShock Infinite* in miniature: structured as a hub, with "spokes" extending into the world beyond. Each spoke (or in this case: building), is host to some of the characters Ken is creating. Little dramas are unfolding there, until the player peels back the curtain mid-performance, peering into the ghastly mess of people surviving—isolated from the crumbling nightmare outside.

The game is a shooter first, and it'll always be about the accurate positioning of crosshairs, but every person you meet will have a backstory. Their role will be shaped by their beliefs; they'll make you wonder about how they got there. Bigger, bolder—*BioShock Infinite* already feels epic. It has its head in the clouds, but that's exactly why it's so exciting. ■

Need to know

What is it?
A WWII RTS with vast battle spaces and numerous tools for deceiving enemies

Influenced by
Company of Sudden Blitzkrieg Panzers, David Blaine

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce 8800GTX/ Radeon HD 4870

Alternatively
StarCraft II (93%)

Copy protection
Steam

The delicious dilemmas in *RUSE* rarely have just two horns.

FEINT PRAISE

The art of deception meets the art of war in **RUSE**'s fresh take on World War II strategy ***by Tim Stone***

Thanks to the killjoys behind The Hague and the Geneva Convention it's now illegal to win a war by inviting your enemies to sham peace talks and then feeding them poisoned dan-ishes. You can't disguise your tanks as ambulances. Soldiers can't even use fake arms to pretend to surrender any more. All the furtive fun has been stripped from warfare.

Well, *almost* all. The noble art of misdirecting a foe with mock attacks and bogus buildings, intercepting and decrypting communications—that's all still legal, and it's such shenanigans that are celebrated in this surprisingly fresh, unfailingly entertaining WWII RTS.

Doing something novel with one of strategy gaming's most-used themes is a tall order, but Eugen has managed it. In addition to the titular ruses (more on those later) the Parisian devs blow the cobwebs away with truly massive battlefields. Rolling your mousewheel backwards in this game is like snagging your pants on a V2 rocket. One minute you're down on the deck amongst ravishing villages, pastures and woods, the next you're up in the stratosphere viewing entire regions through a veil of wispy cirrus.

Observing battles from church-tower height is lovely, but entirely impractical. Most of the time you'll hover a few thousand feet higher, at a level where you can take in all forces, factories and supply dumps at once.

Money truck

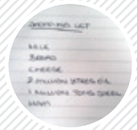
Supply dumps are the tributaries that keep *RUSE*'s rivers of blood flowing and growing. Scattered across every map, once secured they periodically pump out the truck convoys that transport cash to your HQ. That cash can be blown on factories, research projects and units. Just as in real-world 1944, when Allied forces financed their push across Normandy by grabbing the piles of money that dotted the French countryside, so it is in-game.

This pillage-to-progress mechanic might be better suited to a Genghis Khan RTS than a WWII one, but it captivates all the same. Skirmishes for supply dumps give shape to the fighting. A minute doesn't pass when you're not eyeing the next dump. There's a constant tension between protecting possessions you've already built, and nabbing the means to construct more. I've got $50 in the bank—do I spend it on a flak gun and an MG nest to guard my newly built tank plant, or splash it on occupying a new supply source, knowing that'll mean my screen of sentinels is spread even thinner?

That $50 would also buy the paratrooper squads or light tanks needed to interdict my enemy's northern supply line. It would research the next rung on the armor ladder, or pay for a secondary HQ up by that windmill (thus cutting traveling times for my supply convoys). The delicious dilemmas in *RUSE* rarely have just two horns.

Downfall

Hitler's WWII-losing folly, in the vernacular of *RUSE*



Requisition omission
He failed to secure enough supply dumps.

Technical blunder
He put too much faith in costly upgrades.

More than he can chew
In Europe, he chose to play 2vs3, on "Hard" difficulty.

Following orders

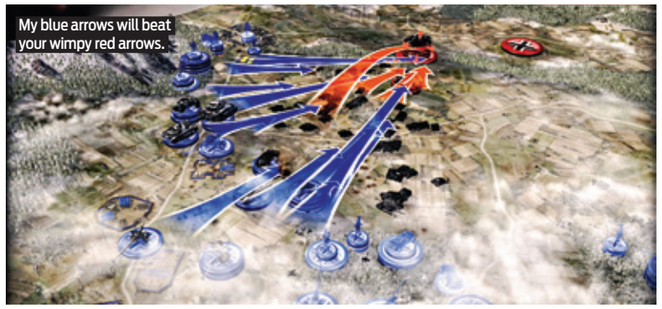
With so many tactical temptations, it's a mercy that Eugen has made the business of orchestrating an offensive and mounting a defense so simple. Unit stances, order types, ammo, repairs, minelaying—anything with even a hint of fussiness to it has been ruthlessly ripped out of the traditional WWII RTS formula. Grab your units and tell them where to go: that's the rude *RUSE* way. It's a testament to the impressive array of units (six factions each with around 30 units) and interesting approach to terrain that the simplicity never feels simplistic.

Nestling among the horde of historical absurdities are some pleasing tactical half-truths. Stick a mob of infantry and AT guns in a crucial forest and it's the Battle of Hurtgen all over again. Put them in a town and it's Ortona. *RUSE* could just as aptly have been called *Ambush* or *Boo! Bushwacht Am Rhein*.

Because stationary defenders in woody or bricky areas are virtually invisible and super-deadly, and tanks can only penetrate such locales along narrow dangerous roads, probing becomes a perilous business. Advancing without sufficient artillery and bombers to pummel likely hiding places and recon to expose lurking threats is asking for a very bloody nose.

If there's anything more satisfying than watching a group of friendly ambushers tear up a column of

©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/THEPROPSHOPPE.MILOSLUZ.MUCHOMOR.TACOJIM



incautious Panzers, it's seeing an enemy scramble to meet to an attack comprised entirely of incorporeal decoy units. Weirdly, for a game about WWII operational warfare, by default every military entity is visible at all times to all players (albeit in the case of units, in the form of generic light/heavy/aircraft icons). It seems like an insane piece of design until you see the effects ruses and line-of-sight have on this naked battlefield.

Smoke and mirrors

Just because you can see exactly where your opponent's structures and forces are, doesn't mean you can trust what you see. Every couple of minutes, players get a token that can be traded for one of 10 ruse types. Sector-specific (every map is chunked into arbitrary areas), these battle-turning tricks include measures that temporarily expose enemy orders (Decryption), hide forces (Radio Silence), erect fake buildings (Decoy Structure) or disguise real ones (Camo Net). You can identify enemy unit icons (Spy) or switch the appearance of your own units from light to heavy (Revert Intel). There are myriad ways of pulling wool over watching eyes.

The ruses work great—it's just a shame some aren't that rusey. Two of the most useful—Blitzkrieg (speeds up troops and supply/construction vehicles) and Fanaticism (prevents the retreats that alarmed units automatically perform)—are about as duplicitous as Desmond Tutu.

Underhand or overhand, the AI uses ruses to good effect. What it's less competent at is dealing with the brutally effective ambushes mentioned earlier. In skirmish mode, even with the dial turned up to "hard" you can win with comfortable margins simply by huddling defenses in and around protective terrain and waiting for the enemy to mosey into your meat grinder. He may try alternate routes and bring up the big guns and bombers, but you should still come out on top.

For a stiff single-player challenge, play against a team of foes. Mix up the nations and profiles (the AI comes in six different personae including turtler, blitzkrieg and air force fiend), and suddenly waiting like a trapdoor spider in woods and piazzas is a far less effective tactic.

War story

A "hard" campaign should also stretch all but the most able. At medium difficulty there were several occasions when relentless opposition or a tight timetable forced me to restart and rethink a mission. Sturdy rather than startling, the 23-episode story takes in all the obvious Western Front hotspots before wandering off into a wacky nuclear-tinged fantasy. Your companions on this march are four of the least credible/likeable WWII brass hats you could ever wish to meet. Note to games industry: writing WWII dialog? Go watch *Band of Brothers* or (gasp!) try reading some period memoirs.

One suspects the devs would brush off criticism of the single-player content by bringing up multiplayer. They'd have a point: *RUSE* has everything—except perhaps a map editor and a panoply of play modes—necessary to woo the company-craving strategist. Superbly balanced over the course of a lengthy public beta, it's pleasingly resistant to rushes and liberally sprinkled with the kind of little victories that make defeats palatable. Once you learn to take a few simple precautions against students of Student [*Colonel Kurt Student, establisher of Germany's paratrooper force—Military Ed.*] and get the hang of mounting those powerful ambushes, gaining a foothold against even an experienced player isn't hard.

Though the campaign admits one only, two of the grandiosely titled "operations" (historically inspired standalone scenarios) can be enjoyed cooperatively, as can any of the larger skirmishes. As an old wargamer I would've liked to have seen some economy-free game styles in which victory locations, rather than unit kills, decided victory. I also found myself picturing a play mode in which orders are rationed on a per-minute basis. There's plenty of room for cunning, but *RUSE* remains a game where the nimblest mouser has a big advantage.

Normally, this would be the point in an Ubisoft review where I raged about the draconian DRM. Not this time—*RUSE* uses the more agreeable Steam for copy protection, and that won't stop you from enjoying this accomplished addition to the Sherman-shuffling genre. ■

Superbly balanced, it's resistant to rushes and sprinkled with little victories.

VERDICT

Compelling, slick, handsome. The predictable campaign and so-so skirmish AI are mere flesh wounds.

PC GAMER 84

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ubisoft ◆ **Developer** Eugen Systems
◆ **Multiplayer** 8 players ◆ **Link** www.rusegame.com ◆ **ESRB** T

EPIDEMIC

Killing zombies with stuffed dinosaurs in **DEAD RISING 2** is as much fun as it sounds, but you have to work to earn it ***by John Walker***

Need to know

What is it?
Third-person zombie genocide
Influenced by
George A. Romero
Play it on
2.4GHz dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce GTX 260/Radeon HD 4870
Alternatively
Left 4 Dead 2 (92%)
Copy protection
GfWL

For about four hours, *Dead Rising 2* is one of the most frustrating games ever. It's like looking at incredible fun through thick, soundproof glass. What should be a non-stop parade of gory zombie deaths starts as an exercise in exasperation. The development philosophy appears to have been to come up with a core concept of almost limitless entertainment, and to then think of as many obstacles as possible to put between this and the player. Luckily, it gets much better.

The original *Dead Rising* wasn't released on the PC, so you may not be familiar with the concept, which is to hit thousands of zombies with hundreds of weapons while rescuing survivors. Five years later, there's been another zombie outbreak—and one man's being blamed for it.

That'd be Chuck Greene, a motocross champion forced to compete in zombie-killing contests to raise the money to buy Zombrex—a drug that prevents those who have been bitten from turning—for his young daughter. Managing to reach a safehouse, Chuck decides to venture into the huge complex to search for survivors and gather enough Zombrex to keep his daughter alive.

Off with their heads

There's a core plot, and many optional sidequests that appear for a limited amount of time. And completing all of these involves running around slaughtering the undead or psychopathic humans with almost any object in the world. An axe, a trash can, a beach ball, a park bench, maybe a giant robot teddy.

New to the sequel is the superb ability to combine weapons, enabling even more ludicrous attacks. It's hard to express the satisfaction of taking out dozens of zombies at once with an axe taped to a sledgehammer, swung in insane circles. Such maneuvers gain extra Prestige Points when used on zombies, helping Chuck to level up.

And here's the issue: until you've leveled up to get extra health, additional inventory spaces for carrying weapons and vital health-giving foodstuffs, better attacks and more weapon combos, it's a ridiculous struggle. The refusal to enable even checkpoint saves seems to be a wanton act of spite by the developers. Instead you must find a toilet—of which there are few—to save at, and it's possible to unwittingly save in an unwinnable state, too far from your next deadline. Boss fights can prove unexpected, and failure means going back to whenever you were last able to find a crapper. There's no reason for it, and it mars the entire game.

However, the game blossoms after the early stages, becoming the idiotic playground it should have been throughout—so go ahead and dress Chuck up in children's pajamas, flip-flops and a football helmet, and take out a crowd with a baseball bat studded with nails.

Like the George Romero films that inspired it, *DR2*'s absurd scenarios are often used to make clever social commentary, and multiple endings genuinely reflect the choices you've made.

Still, the game never quite shakes off the impression that it's desperately trying to frustrate you, tempering the gory funhouse action. As it is, it's a mix of immense fun and a sore throat from shouting at your monitor. ■

Dress to kill

Chuck's wardrobe gives plenty of options. Cut 'em out and try it at home!

The concept is to hit thousands of zombies with hundreds of weapons.

VERDICT

Wantonly enjoyable and inventive zombie slaughter, held back by some unnecessary saving and leveling hassles.

PC GAMER **82**

◆ **Price** $40 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Capcom ◆ **Developer** Blue Castle Games ◆ **Multiplayer** Co-op, 4-player deathmatch ◆ **Link** www.deadrising-2.com ◆ **ESRB** M

Without her medication, Chuck's cute daughter Katey will turn into a cute zombie.

Psychopaths don't come much more psychopathic. Brrr.

The baseball bat with nails is one of the most reliable weapons in the game.

That's a lot of cranberry sauce.

Purple hats make zombies look much scarier.

TEMPERAMENTAL

Fantasy strategy **ELEMENTAL: WAR OF MAGIC** launched too soon, but it's getting better ***by Tom Francis***

Need to know

What is it?
Turn-based fantasy strategy where you play as an RPG hero while managing an empire

Influenced by
Master of Magic

Play it on
3GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800/ Radeon HD 2900

Alternatively
Galactic Civilizations II: Ultimate Edition

Copy protection
None, but Impulse software required for updates

I need 1,300 gold immediately. The latest bit of military research I've unlocked lets me make teams of things, and one of the things I can make teams of is my killer Hell Dogs from Hell. This gives the resulting unit six times their enormous health, six times their enormous damage, and for reasons that aren't really clear to me, six times their enormous armor rating. So even though it's just six Hell Dogs from Hell standing next to each other, they take 36 times as long to kill. 1,300 is a lot of gold—or Gildar as it's pointlessly renamed in *Elemental*—but for 36 Hell Dogs from Hell, it's a steal.

Elemental is mainly a turn-based strategy game, but there's a turn-based RPG in there too. Your Sovereign is a hero who can level up as he slays the fantasy landscape's indigenous creatures and enemy factions. You get resources by founding new towns near mineral deposits, by killing creatures or by trading with other races. So now I'm trying to figure out what I can sell to a wealthy minor faction in the south.

Materials? I made good cash early on selling them way more than they needed, so they're wise to me now.

Metal? Ditto.

Crystal? I don't have much, and I want it for myself—I need it to make magic items for my troops.

A fool and his money

My wife. I can sell my wife? Why can I sell my wife? How can I sell my wife? What happens to my wife if I sell her? Am I really going to sell my wife? More to the point, how much will they pay for my wife?

All of it. Everything they have and, if they had it, more—over 8,000 goldzor or whatever. I have no idea why. She's not worth that much to me, and I'm *married* to her.

Well, that settles it. A pleasure—an uneasy and slightly guilty pleasure—doing business with you guys. Enjoy the Hell Dogs from Hell that I can now afford to destroy you with.

The Hell Dogs are unstoppable, and I win a long-but-unchallenging while later. The whole experience is typical of *Elemental*: exciting possibilities, confusingly stupid decisions from the AI, masses of freedom to come up with killer combinations, and absolutely no resistance when you do so. The game has been released far, far too early, and what we've ended up with is a tantalizing prototype for a phenomenal game that just doesn't exist yet.

Elementary

The sad part is, I'm happy it's even reached this stage. When *Elemental* launched, it barely worked. On every machine I tried it on, it would crash to desktop so frequently as to be practically unplayable, and the AI was so bad you couldn't even call it stupid—it barely *moved*.

That's the game Stardock put in the box, relying on a day-one patch to get it to an acceptable state—but the game's requirements don't include an internet connection.

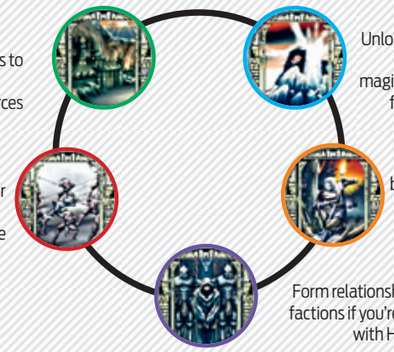
It was *five* patches before the game was stable on either my home or work PCs, and a week after release, multiplayer still isn't there. I don't mean it's not good yet, I mean it's *not there*. They just left a whole feature out, one that's advertised on the box, with the intention of "switching it on" later. So this review is of the 1.06 version of the game, which is stable but still very rough. Updates are posted on www.elementalgame.com.

Elemental has a campaign, but it's really more of a tutorial. The meat of it is in large-scale one-off matches against up to nine AI opponents, on fantasy continents that are randomly chosen and randomly populated, but not themselves randomly generated. You explore in search of resource tiles, then build towns on them.

There are also curiosities like treasure chests that your Sovereign can investigate for small resource rewards, and other low-level heroes you can recruit. And, long before you run into any other civilizations, you'll deal with a lot of local wildlife and brigands. So you develop your

Your research options

Elemental's tech tree has more to it than most others



Imperium
Unlocks city improvements to produce more money, resources and research.

Magic
Unlocks new books of spells, and magical equipment for your troops.

Conquest
Unlocks better weapons and armor to make troops with, and larger squads of them.

Adventure
New quests, better goodies, but nastier creatures.

Diplomacy
Form relationships with other factions if you're good guys, or with Hell Dogs if not.

Am I really going to sell my wife?

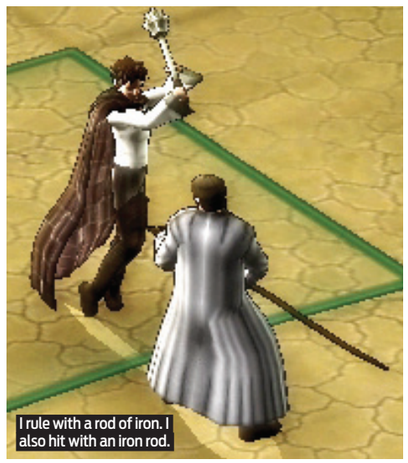
You can make new buildings with the mod tools.

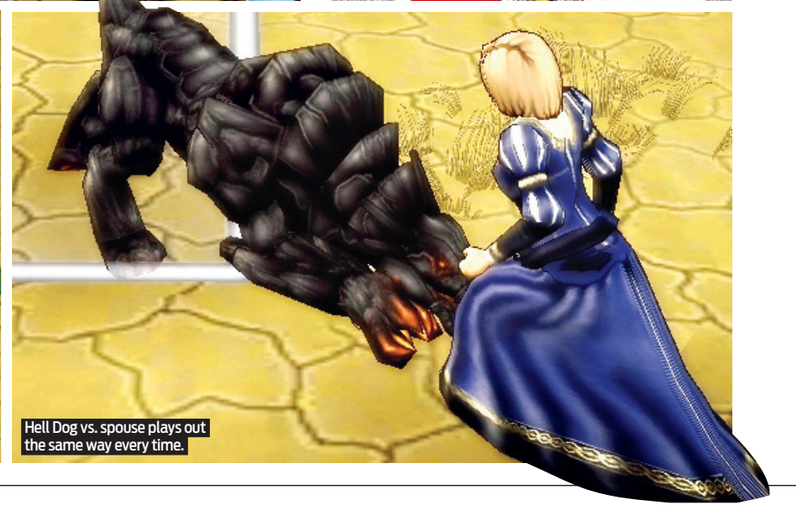
Naming your towns demands imagination.

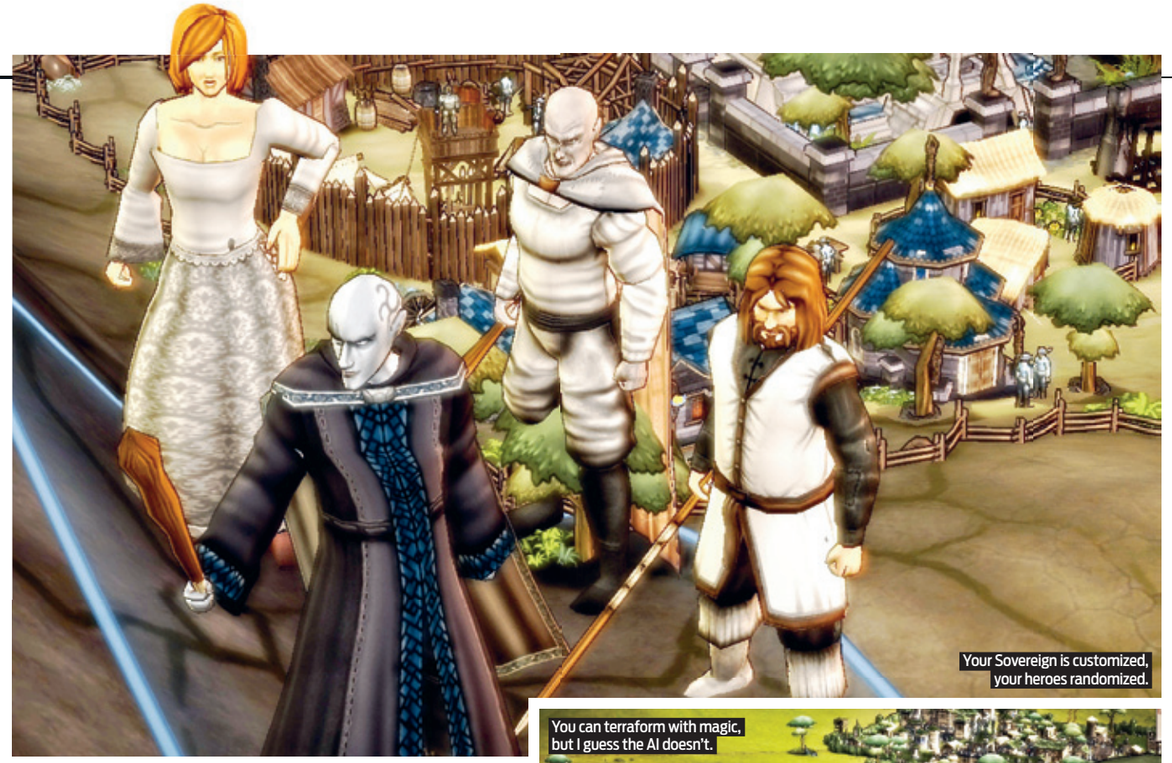
You could pay to train an army, or you could summon these guys.

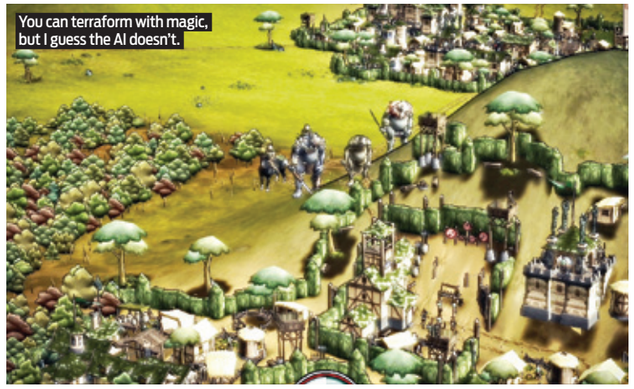
Yeah, it takes a bit of artistic license with scale.

When a building completes, it seems to explode.


I rule with a rod of iron. I also hit with an iron rod.


Hell Dog vs. spouse plays out the same way every time.


Your Sovereign is customized, your heroes randomized.


You can terraform with magic, but I guess the AI doesn't.

Cloth map mode is clearer, and pretty in its own way.

Chain Lightning is really just Unfortunate Weather.

At this point, the game is pretty much won.

town and found new ones while your heroes fight monsters and level up. And eventually, you clash with someone else doing the same thing.

At times it's a tremendously *exciting* game: when I realized I could buy a horse and a bow for my Sovereign, I blew a nerdgasket. Marriage is pretty rudimentary—click on someone of the opposite sex and click "marry"—but when your kids come of age and become units in your army, there's a wonderful sense of attachment and pride.

Periodically able

But most of this excitement is over the game *Elemental* could be, rather than the game it is. You keep finding cool new things to try, and the AI keeps finding sad new ways to lose. I'm one of the most reckless, incompetent and deluded generals imaginary history has ever known, and even for me, six AI opponents on the "Ridiculous" difficulty setting are boringly easy. That's the smartest AI the game has, with cheaty bonus resources, but it doesn't feel like it. Wealth can't cure stupidity.

In dozens and dozens of hours of play, the AI has declared war on me perhaps twice, and invaded a town once. In every other case, I've steamrolled them out of boredom as much as any strategic necessity.

Occasionally one race will expand dramatically, but they're still trivial to topple because they don't understand one of the game's core mechanics: if your Sovereign dies in enemy territory, your whole empire is wiped out. So when you take the town they're in, do enemy Sovereigns run from this newly hostile territory? I'll give you a clue: it rhymes with, "No, they don't, in fact they sometimes run directly into this territory if they're not already in it, because they are blorons."

They also have no personality. The races are all human or human-with-grey-skin, as if Stardock were wrestling with a tight makeup budget, and their attitudes are just as interchangeable. It's a strange flaw to have, because the greatest example of characterful AI I've ever seen was the last 4X strategy game Stardock developed: *Galactic Civilizations II*.

Killer combinations

Three quick routes to total domination

- Research Umberdroth Hounds + Research military teams + Raise 1,300 Gildar = Train unstoppable Hell Dog pack
- Learn Fire, Ice and Earth spellbooks + Level up your Essence + Reach spell level 5 = Summon a squad of deadly Elemental Demons
- Research bows + Buy one for your Sovereign + Research damage-boosting magic items = Win most fights without taking damage

That game also knew how to generate a strategically interesting landscape, even better than the *Civilization* series. The good planets were so rare and exciting that I fought for them rabidly, and I could specialize each one I conquered so that it meant something to me. In *Elemental*, one patch of gold and fertile land is much like another, and so are the towns you build on them.

Flatland

In theory you can specialize, but in practice almost everything you can build is (a) cheap and (b) a one-per-town deal. So you may as well add one to each settlement, making an efficient but utterly boring empire. There's rarely any strong strategic motive to invade a specific part of your enemy's empire, nor any emotional punch to losing a specific part of yours. It's a very flat game.

One of the things I like most about all Stardock games is the sense of discovery. They're all absurdly ambitious, dauntingly complex and wonderfully unrestrictive. It takes a bit of manual scouring, forum trawling, and avid attention every time a loading screen tip pops up, but that's all part of the nerdy pleasure of an overly intricate game.

That's still true of *Elemental*: for most of my playing time I enjoyed exploring the possibilities—such as the possibility of selling my wife to buy better Hell Dogs. The difference is that once you've done that, you're playing *Elemental* on a level its AI can't compete with, and every match starts to unfold the same way. It was enough fun to be worth the money, for me, but it's little more than a template for the game it could have been. The game it might still become, with enough patching.

I'm baffled and saddened that they'd release it like this. The unforgivable state of the game at launch, the inert AI and the entirely missing multiplayer all stem from that single enormous mistake. It's one of the most catastrophic decisions I've ever seen a great developer make.

And Stardock is usually the good guy: CEO Brad Wardell wrote a Gamer's Bill of Rights that says we deserve finished games out of the box. The team's skills at producing fun AI are unmatched—they are perhaps the only ones capable of doing this game idea justice.

Instead, they've taken more than three years of work and kicked it out in a state that's turned anticipation into outrage, community excitement to shared disappointment and the goodwill of fanboys like me into total dismay.

As a game? It's pretty good. As a decision? An utter disaster. ■

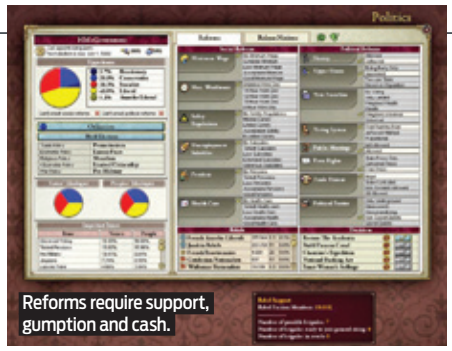
I'm baffled and saddened that they'd release it like this.

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Stardock Entertainment ◆ **Developer** Stardock Entertainment ◆ **Multiplayer** To be added in a future patch ◆ **Link** www.elementalgame.com ◆ **ESRB** T

VERDICT

The bare bones of a hugely exciting strategy-RPG hybrid. The the AI just isn't good enough to make it special, yet.

PC GAMER 70


Reforms require support, gumption and cash.

The Prussians don't go down easy.

RAILROADED

VICTORIA II gives you a century, a world and a migraine to conquer ***by Troy Goodfellow***

Need to know

What is it?
A real-time 4X game with war, diplomacy and railroads

Influenced by
Europa Universalis, Imperialism

Play it on
3GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800GT/ Radeon HD 3850

Alternatively
Europa Universalis III (82%)

Copy protection
Serial key

By the time the sun sets on your empire in *Victoria II*, you'll have seen the early 19th century in full regalia: industrialization, the American Civil War, communism and nationalism all make appearances as you travel a century era of national improvement and expansion.

It might take newcomers a real century to figure out precisely what is going on in this glacially paced real-time 4X strategy game. Even though *VII* has the best tutorial Paradox has ever designed, it's attached to its most foreboding franchise. For people unfamiliar with *Victoria*, or any other Paradox game, the mass of numbers and menus can't help but be overwhelming, and the gameplay is highly nuanced. To move your country forward, you must learn the art of nudging your people slightly, so that they become more accepting of those desired reforms that will civilize the nation, but not so quickly that they rise up against stubborn rulers.

Guilt-free iron fist

That's the idea, anyway. The political system is very sophisticated and one of the best attempts to model political evolution I've seen in a game, and you can build a "Sphere of Influence" over other nations in a mechanic that, while repetitive, brilliantly captures the period's diplomatic struggles. The problem is that more often than not, you can resort to the bayonet to clear any troublemakers with no real consequences for doing so. Liberal rebellion across Austria? Why bother trying to stave it off when massacres of the rebels work just fine? The army becomes your hammer, and every serious domestic problem a nail.

Many menus take care of themselves, and this more hands-off approach is a huge improvement over the micromanagement hell of the first game in the series, but this is still a game for the hardest of the hardcore. Unlike *Europa Universalis III*, there are no missions to push you into trouble, so you must seek your own. But the world is mostly settled, wars are generally avoidable and money is easy to come by. Why rock the boat?

It can get boring to see the Civil War erupt in 1849 like clockwork, but there is a rich alternate history here—which will be all the richer once some of the bugs related to slaves, craftsmen and immigration get worked out. The AI is competent at fighting major wars, though it has a strange idea of who is threatening to whom; my Russian conquest of Prussia annoyed the British, but Vienna just yawned.

Encouraging investment in Catalonian railroads may not be exciting, but this is one of *Victoria II*'s charms. Success can be peaceful, progress is gradual, your people are divided. It still needs some work, but it's certainly worth dabbling in. ■

◆ **Price** $40 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Paradox Interactive ◆ **Developer** Paradox Interactive ◆ **Multiplayer** 32 players ◆ **Link** www.victoria2.com ◆ **ESRB** T

VERDICT

A few too many minor annoyances gang up to keep Paradox's most polished release from reaching greatness.

PC GAMER **76**

The authoritarian police force seems a lot more evil than the resistance.

Cad the Magnificent doesn't do small talk.

Even more costume pieces have been added to the character creator.

No, not the face! Please not the—aaaaargh!

NO MORE HEROES

In **CITY OF HEROES: GOING ROGUE**, you're not so much a renegade as a rebel without a clue *by Tom Senior*

Need to know

What is it?
A *City of Heroes* expansion that adds a new low-level zone, a new alignment system and new power sets

Influenced by
City of Villains

Play it on
2GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 9800GT/ Radeon HD 4890

Alternatively
Champions Online (74%)

Copy protection
Subscription

"Do you require assistance, Cad the Magnificent?" These are the first words spoken to my hero upon arrival in Praetoria, the shiny new zone provided by *City of Heroes*' latest expansion, *Going Rogue*. Cad the Magnificent does not require assistance. He requires only a quest marker and a dozen identical mobs, preferably guarding several identical facilities in which he can unleash a series of tempestuous new abilities. He's in the right place.

To enter Praetoria, you have to create a new character and choose to support either the authoritarian forces that maintain the clinical new utopia, or to join the over-zealous resistance movement. As you become famous, you'll have opportunities to swap sides. Whoever you work for, most missions will take place in a sewer, a warehouse or a science base. Aside from some rare and more-interesting story missions, objectives tend to range from "Kill the big bad guy" to "Kill all the bad guys"—or, in some cases, "Click on these boxes that belong to the bad guys."

Super powers

It's a lot more fun than it should be. *CoH* still has some of the best combat around, and the four new power sets included here are great additions. Whether you're vanquishing foes with whirling, noisy gun-fu, unleashing electric golems or summoning demons from the netherworld, you get tremendous power almost immediately.

A suite of new "ultra" quality settings have been introduced to apply some spit and polish to the aging streets. They look great in the new city, but fail to reinvigorate the dogged older zones. The good news is that *Going Rogue*'s alignment system will allow your characters to see *more* of the old environments—completing its missions will blur the lines between good and evil, and give your character the chance to switch sides completely. However, most *CoH* vets are likely to have alter egos on the other side, and have already seen all the zones. There is a chance to align your characters even more strongly with their favored path, earning powerful enhancements, but this alone is hardly worth the price.

It's hard to know exactly who *Going Rogue* is aimed at. Seasoned players will be disappointed by the lack of new late-game content, and new players will find a pretty new zone full of repetitive quests which you're forced to leave at level 20. The awesome new power sets should be enough to entice loyal players to roll alts and explore the new city, but for everyone else it's an underwhelming addition to a great game. ■

VERDICT

A confused update that ends up pleasing no one. It's dogged by repetitive quests, but the epic new powers can't fail to excite.

PC GAMER **67**

◆ **Price** $30 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** NCsoft ◆ **Developer** Paragon Studios
◆ **Multiplayer** Massively ◆ **Link** www.cityofheroes.com ◆ **ESRB** T

Dynamite is a worm's best friend.

WORM TURNS

Fumbling with high explosives livens up **WORMS RELOADED** *by Dan Stapleton*

As the name implies, *Reloaded*'s goal is to replicate, not reinvent the classic 2D *Worms* gameplay that reached its peak in the '90s, and it does an excellent job of recapturing that magic. The colorful, high-definition cartoon graphics stretch all the way across my widescreen monitor, giving me a full view of my team of four adorable-yet-heavily-armed invertebrates as they battle rivals in turn-based action combat. Using an over-the-top arsenal of shotguns, dynamite, exploding sheep and airstrikes, they obliterate enemies, the outlandish terrain they stand on and, if you're not careful, themselves.

Reloaded revels in customization, offering dozens of options for your team (though not individual worms, sadly). My "Stapeworms" used the L33t voicepack (which chirps nerd-isms like "Grenades are totally OP!"), wore *Predator*-style helmets and were named after my pets. In our 1v1 matches, Josh dressed his team in purple wizard caps and set them to spout lines inspired by movie trailers. This game is not lacking in humorous character.

The controls are pretty much unchanged from the original, and a bit unforgiving, which meant I was more of a threat to my own worms than Josh's when it came to using grenades. I *really* wish there were tooltips describing the weapons, since the ticking timer doesn't stop while I pick from the dozens available—instead, I had to figure out how to use new weapons like the deployable turret (which fires on enemies during their turn) and the enigmatically named Buffalo of Lies through trial and error.

A single-player campaign teaches basic concepts like jetpacking and ninja-roping, and lets you unlock even more custom content, but a few of the puzzles left me frustrated and gave no way to skip ahead. A more alluring new feature is full integration with Steam, offering easy multiplayer matchmaking, friend invites, leaderboards, achievements and staticky voice chat. There are plenty of AI personalities of varying difficulty to take on, too.

My games against Josh were hilariously entertaining and full of smack talk, and became increasingly competitive as we relearned the ropes. This is a game that you can—and should—pull a buddy or three into for a quick, 10- to 20-minute brawl and a few yuks. ■

PC GAMER **76**

◆ **Price** $20 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Team 17 Software ◆ **Developer** Team 17 Software
◆ **Multiplayer** 4 players ◆ **Link** www.team17.com ◆ **ESRB** NR

How, um, romantic?

The cloned fur flies in **SAM & MAX: SEASON 3, EPISODE 4**

Beyond the Alley of the Dolls offers a fantastic opening, with psychopathic toy-hunting clones of Sam rampaging through the city. The ending is also one of Telltale's best so far, with some creepy puzzles and a decent baddie.

Between those points, there's something missing. The mid-game settings—a warehouse and a cloning plant—are dull to explore, the script contains few memorable gags and the puzzles don't impress. More disappointingly, nothing interesting is done with the psychic powers until the ending shape-shifting battle. But it does set up the season finale in style. ■ *Richard Cobbett*

PC GAMER **52**

Not everyone's making it out of this one alive.

The devil takes his due in **SAM & MAX: SEASON 3, EPISODE 5**

The City That Dares Not Sleep is a comedy first and foremost, and a wonderfully imaginative finale to the season. But it's oddly somber, and feels like an epilogue, potentially to Telltale's stint as *Sam & Max*'s storytellers.

Ep 5 has a different feel—a new intro, bigger sets, easier puzzles and Max as a snarky enemy using psychic powers to sabotage you. The superb Narrator's *Twilight Zone*-style commentary remains the unquestionable comedic highlight.

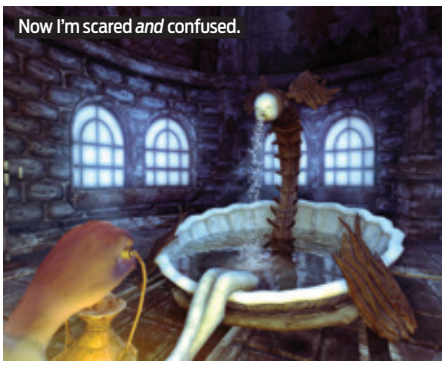
It's been an excellent year for the Freelance Police; it would be a shame for the series to end here, but it gives a fitting send-off. ■ *Richard Cobbett*

PC GAMER **74**

◆ **Price** $35 (for the whole five-episode season) ◆ **Release** Out now
◆ **Link** www.telltalegames.com ◆ **ESRB** E10+

This fellow isn't quite as dead as he should be.

You've got no hope. No. Hope.



Now I'm scared *and* confused.

MEMORABLE

Creepy adventure **AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT** doesn't forget how to scare *by Al Bickham*

Need to know

What is it?
Gun-shy survival horror

Influenced by
H.P. Lovecraft, darkness in general

Play it on
2.6GHz dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce GTX 260/Radeon HD 4870

Alternatively
Penumbra: Black Plague (83%)

Copy protection
Digital service-specific

OK, I'm pretty scared. I've just been stalked through a sewer by something I can't see, let alone fight.

The only thing that gave it away was the languid *ker-splosh* of its footsteps as it followed me. Every time I lost my footing on the path of tottering crates and other detritus and landed in the water, a flurry of splashing rose as it made for my meat. It was panic-inducingly horrible. I made errors in judgment, I missed jumps, I clenched. When it was all over, I wept a bit.

Amnesia does Lovecraft in the purest sense: it understands that the imagined far outweighs the known in its psychological punch, and it gives you enough cues to visualize a larger carnival of horrors. From the developers behind the *Penumbra* series, this is a worthy successor with higher production values, heaps more atmosphere and a deeper exploration of horror and insanity. These screenshots shout first-person shooter, but *Amnesia* shares more in common with point-and-click adventure than FPS. There's not a weapon in sight; it's all about puzzles, exploiting the physics engine, combining items to apply to the environment and hiding from the nasties.

Dark and spooky

True to the title, you begin with zero knowledge aside from one fact: your name is Daniel. You wake up in a medieval castle and find a note you wrote to yourself. The whole place is graveyard-dim—you need to collect tinderboxes to light torches and oil for your lamp to keep the shadows at bay. As the plot expands through further diaries and flashbacks, the unsavory purpose behind your presence becomes apparent.

Spend too long in the dark, and madness beckons. As Daniel's sanity starts to stutter, imagination plays merry hell. Insects skitter across your vision, the input lag between mouse-gesture and action degrades, the ground lurches and you'll hear things—whispers and horrid noises, one of which can only be described as someone pulling crabs apart.

One area of the game is devoted to revealing the psychological and physical specifics of medieval torture methods; fascinating in a horribly suggestive way. When it's not breathing down your neck or trying to eat your face, *Amnesia* shows you bad things and makes you feel dirty.

That's its triumph: grisly atmosphere over genre convention, with tension and release in keen balance. It seems rude to nitpick: some of the vocal delivery lacks a fine touch, and occasionally you'll have no idea what the puzzle you're working on is meant to achieve—you just have to keep trying things out. But despite its title, *Amnesia* remembers what the blockbusters of survival horror seem to have forgotten: how to horrify. ■

◆ Price $20 **◆ Release** Out now **◆ Publisher** Frictional Games **◆ Developer** Frictional Games
◆ Multiplayer No **◆ Link** www.amnesiagame.com **◆ ESRB** T

VERDICT

Rich in atmosphere and big on scares, *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* goes where survival horror fears to tread.

PC GAMER **88**

ROUGH TRADE

You have to navigate to accumulate in **COMMANDER: CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS** *by Tim Stone*

Need to know

What is it?
A mix of colony cultivation, commerce and cannonball tennis (really)

Influenced by
East India Company, *Dawn of Discovery*

Play it on
2GHz dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800GT/ Radeon HD 4850

Alternatively
Civilization IV: Colonization (84%)

Copy protection
Online activation

Were *Commander: Conquest of the Americas* a loaf of bread, I'd say it didn't have enough yeast in it. Were it a bowl of goulash, I'd say it needed paprika. Because it's a game, and I'm paid to talk insightfully about games, I'll go with "*CotA* needs more pixie dust."

Constructed in the same drydock as *East India Company*, this voyage through the first two centuries of transatlantic trade combines elements of many strong strategy games. There's the New World settlement ribs of *Colonization*, the naval combat crossbeams of *Empire: Total War* and the mercantile management planking of the *Patrician* games. Nitro nails the parts together with evident care, but still ends up with a vessel that's more plodding ferry than trim frigate.

The problem certainly isn't in the battle layer. Though enemy captains are a tad rigid in their thinking and ship speeds don't appear to be influenced by cargo weight, watery warfare is nonetheless gripping. The diverse tub types boast stat-boosting design mods, crews bolstered by specialists like navigators and surgeons, and captains with different talents and experience levels.

Port forwarding

It's the action between combat that has the weevils in it. *CotA*'s trade and civic management often feel flat. Because settlements are largely self-reliant and it's impossible to moor in foreign ports, there's little reason to set up interesting or intricate trade networks. Most of your cargo craft end up shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic with New World commodities or eager settlers and soldiers, depending on direction.

Town stewardship is similarly simplistic. Where, in a game like *Dawn of Discovery*, burgs are living, breathing hives full of needy, busy bees, here they feel like statistical formulae dumped on the American shore. What's life like in Sweet Swamp or Newyork-Newyork? I've no idea, but I can give you exact morale and population figures.

Nitro attempted to breathe air into the game's saggy sails with a mission system, but it's completely flavorless. Every few minutes in the standard campaign, an advisor tosses a tiresome task in your direction. "Build me four warships! Construct two churches! Make peace with the Dutch!" Many of these time-sensitive chores are downright impossible, which wouldn't be a problem if regular failures didn't ultimately lead to GAME OVER.

With more frequent random events, better missions, more interesting foes and an engaging commerce system, *CotA* could have been special rather than just fair. In its present pixie dust-deficient form, most discerning dolphins won't dance for long in its bow wave. ■

◆ **Price** $40 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Paradox Interactive ◆ **Developer** Nitro Games ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.cota-game.com ◆ **ESRB** T

VERDICT

This ship sets her sails aloft, but hits a sandbar. Strong naval combat is marred by shallow trade and town management.

PC GAMER **67**

ALL THE QUEEN'S MEN

Chaps and choppers unite in **ARMA II: BRITISH ARMED FORCES** *by Evan Lahti*

We have a saying in *ArmA II: Operation Arrowhead*: "Don't be a hero." Heroes recklessly charge in. Heroes lose co-op missions.

But in the *British Armed Forces* DLC, I'm a hero, and I'm loving it.

Half the fun in *ArmA II* is in finding ways to break its many military rules. *BAF* delivers 10 hours of missions that let you approach its unscripted combat at your own pace—even if that pace is running in wildly with a fully-automatic grenade launcher and getting shot in the mouth.

BAF's nine standalone missions are the franchise's best single-player content so far. In one, I'm a combat transport helicopter pilot, capably rotoring the AH11 Wildcat. In the next, I'm a sniper with two minutes to blow a SCUD missile launcher's tires with my trusty new AS50 .50 caliber sniper rifle and prevent a nuclear attack.

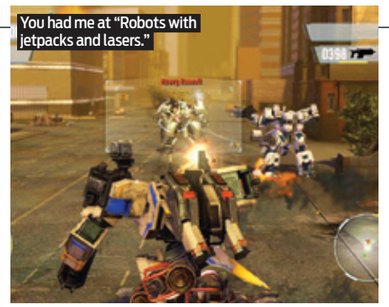
There's also a separate campaign that takes you on a modest tour with a British recon and IED-disarming team, and it's packed with emergent war moments. Three missions in, I tragically flipped my new Jackal 2 on a hill. I stole an enemy truck and drove it straight at a pack of enemy tanks, then hopped to the rear turret to spit missiles at the enemy armor while riding on my momentum.

The only downside to this excellent new content is that you still have to play it using *ArmA II*'s awkward command interface, which, sadly, this DLC does not attempt to improve. ■

PC GAMER **85**

◆ **Price** $10 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** IDEA Games ◆ **Developer** Bohemia Interactive ◆ **Multiplayer** 64 players ◆ **Link** www.arma2.com ◆ **ESRB** M

Real men wear purple robot suits.


You had me at "Robots with jetpacks and lasers."

Under his steel suit, Dylan has a set of steel balls.

WANZER GENERAL

FRONT MISSION EVOLVED retreads old mech game ground, then retreads it again ***by Frank Lepore***

Need to know

What is it?
A futuristic, third-person mech-style shooter

Influenced by
Armored Core, Steel Battalion

Play it on
2.4GHz dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce 9800GT/ Radeon HD 4890

Alternatively
MechWarrior 4: Vengeance (88%)

Copy protection
Steam

Boy's father disappears, boy hops in giant robot suit to find him, boy is inadvertently drafted into the army. *Front Mission Evolved*'s story is a timeless classic if I ever heard one.

It's 2171. You're Dylan Ramsey, a young engineer who's handy with a wanzer (short for "wandering panzer"), and you're in a third-person shooter where your giant war machine nimbly stomps and hops around while firing some very Japanese guns at other robots.

Well, most of the time. There's also a chunk of the game where you'll find yourself severely underdressed for this party, battling enemy mechs on foot. This man-on-mech action is well-paced, and taking down an enemy wanzer with only a rocket launcher is a liberating feeling, but these sections feel like they were included mostly to further the complex storyline (you might need to polish off that bachelors' degree in political science to fully appreciate it) rather than make the game more fun.

Pimp my mech

Back in the pilot's seat, you're given ample opportunity between missions to personalize your wanzer by way of cosmetic alterations and upgraded weapons, armor and skills, much like in past games in the stompy-mech genre (*MechWarrior*, why haven't you written back?). You can outfit yourself with things like shoulder-mounted rockets, machine guns and sniper rifles—I felt a little guilty using the latter, which takes apart opposing wanzers in two hits from a distance.

Having an effective arsenal is a necessity in the frequent boss battles, which are challenging, but not frustratingly so. Even though most battles involve taking on fancier wanzers, you never feel completely outclassed—you're the underdog, so you're forced to devise a strategy and wear them down.

Speaking of wearing down, while the story dialog is all well-acted, bosses tend to repeat the same phrase *ad naseum*. There are only so many times I can hear a mercenary whine, "I could have killed you, but I want you to suffer!" Alright, I get it! I'm suffering!

The level design got somewhat repetitive as well—at times I felt like I was running down the hall of a *Scooby-Doo* cartoon. The henchmen (henchmechs?), too, inspire a sense of *déjà vu*—I must've killed the same Brawler wanzer a thousand times. Fortunately the levels are short, and there's enough variety in the types of environments you tromp through—from bunkers and bridges to urban streets and lush jungles—to keep things interesting.

So yes, *Evolved*'s a bit repetitious, but at least it's repeating something enjoyable: the thrills inherent to driving a walking tank. ■

VERDICT

Good-looking but repetitive action makes *Front Mission Evolved* a tasty mech-flavored appetizer.

PC GAMER **78**

◆ **Price** $50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Square Enix ◆ **Developer** Double Helix Games
◆ **Multiplayer** 8 players ◆ **Link** www.frontmissionevolved.com ◆ **ESRB** T

Rocket duels will never go out of style.

This is the last thing you see before you die.

"Want to be my clan buddy? And maybe my spouse?"

EARTHMOVER

The classic carnage of **QUAKE LIVE** proves the old greats never lose that magic touch ***by Rachel Penny***

Fine, so this is really just a bloodless version of id's old *Quake III Arena* atop a new browser-based foundation. But the difference between this and a super-modern sexo-shooter is that *Quake Live*'s happy to shoot your face off for free, for as long as you want.

After only a tiny download and some quick account creation, you get access to five game modes: duel (intense), free-for-all (glorious), clan arena (hardcore), capture the flag (organized) and team deathmatch (cautious). The action goes down in arenas filled with armor, weapons, power-ups and lightning guns firing in every direction, but not a shred of mercy to be found. The game tracks your stats, too (pro tip: free-for-all is where you'll rack up the most satisfying number of frags).

But before you get your hands on that oh-so-satisfying shotgun, you get a chance to check out the tutorial. It's all "Jump here, use a rocket launcher to propel yourself up there" basics—you can skip it at any time, but it's comprehensive, and sets your skill level for later matchmaking. Even if you were born knowing that stuff, it's still useful for luring in friends who missed *Quake III*.

Friendly fire

Despite the speed of the action I never experienced any lag in *QL*, and whatever mode you pick you'll find a pretty friendly crowd. Even if you're just starting out and spend most of your time as a sort of corpse carpet for other players to trample over, most of the chat is along the "gg" lines. That's partly owed to the excellent matchmaking, and perhaps a sign that browser gamers are a more gentle bunch.

This being a freebie, you will be treated to a bizarre mix of in-game ads and banners badgering you to try new dating sites. (What on Earth is it about the fact that I'm playing *Quake* at 9pm on a Saturday night that makes you think I need help in that department?) It's a small price to pay for unlimited, otherwise-free fragging.

There are pro ($4 per month) and premium ($2 per month) subscriptions available, which will get you extra modes such as freeze tag, 20 premium maps, and the ability to set up your own game servers and to create your own clans. Nice features, sure, but the free package is so good—it includes the friends list, matchmaking, stat tracking and the ability to join one clan—that you'd have to be a dedicated clan player to ever want to upgrade.

Quake might look and feel old-fashioned, but it's hard to knock something that's yours for zero dollars, especially when it's a PC classic. Rediscovering it will keep you too entertained to care. ■

Need to know

What is it?
A fast-paced online FPS

Influenced by
Quake III Arena

Play it on
1GHz CPU, 128MB RAM, Internet Explorer 7+ or Firefox 3+

Alternatively
Unreal Tournament (90%)

Copy protection
Online account

VERDICT

Quake Live may be a 10-year-old shooter, but it's still a rush. This old girl has still got some moves left in her.

PC GAMER **88**

◆ **Price** Free, $2 to $4/month for premium access ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** id Software
◆ **Developer** id Software ◆ **Multiplayer** 32 players ◆ **Link** www.quakelive.com ◆ **ESRB** T

Wait, if he's here, then who's guarding Jabba's palace?

DUNGEM CRAWLER

PUZZLE QUEST 2 mixes pretty colors and RPG-style character progression ***by Evan Lahti***

A robed sorceress meets eyes with an Orc warlord. The mage raises her enchanted staff to meet him, and the mighty titans clash at the height of their fame and glory, turning their weapons forward—to quietly sit down and match gems.

Of course, *Puzzle Quest 2* is more than medieval tic-tac-toe. Infinite Interactive has not only refined the original's gameplay (one of gaming's most addictive drugs), they've created an elaborate scheme to lure you into becoming a pure slave to color matching, temping you with constant rewards.

The shift to a dungeon-crawler presentation, however, wonderfully eases the repetition of gem-matching. You guide your character from an isometric perspective, moving within a many-roomed, many-leveled frozen castle, wading through tons of attractive, original art (as opposed to the gaudy, repetitive map you might expect) between games, creating an intrinsic reward for exploring.

On the game board, *PQ2* stuffs steady complexity and strategy into the turn-based template: a range of spells—both yours and your enemies'—make you think purposefully about your moves. By the second chapter, you're manipulating the board beyond recognition—twisting tiles, replacing rows and setting up double-multipliers to deal damage to your opponent.

I'm almost embarrassed by the sense of drama I felt from such an outwardly modest game. At times I'd hold my breath, hoping the AI wouldn't match a crucial four-in-a-row that'd net it an extra turn. Minibosses, such as a yeti that I faced early on, mix up the rules so that I was always revising my strategy. Blue matches healed him, red ones damaged him. Suddenly my go-to spell that redirects damage to my blue mana pool was worthless—I had to improvise and come up with a new strategy that relied heavily on my red mana pool to defeat him.

There's also multiplayer: four competitive modes, and friends or anonymous jewel-rearrangers can even play as enemies in your campaign, in case you tire of the AI's tricks.

If there's a tedious downside to *PQ2*, it's that its minigames *aren't* escapes from the "match three" mechanic of the main gameplay. Locked doors, treasure chests, magical seals and hidden traps encountered along your journey are all dealt with by matching more mixed-up icons.

But that's what we're here for, right? *PQ2* is brain-tickling puzzling in a fantasy wrapper. It runs perfectly in a window while you're doing something else on your PC; attend to it in free moments to rack up loot, levels, new spells and satisfaction. ■

PC GAMER **86**

◆ **Price** $20 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Namco ◆ **Developer** Infinite Interactive ◆ **Link** www.puzzle-quest.com ◆ **ESRB** E

PC GAMER

How we review

Wherever possible, we finish every game before finalizing the review. We review each game on its own merits and match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The primary aim of the reviews section is to help you make buying decisions. As such, we'll review paid-for content of all types in addition to the latest big-name releases.

Our scoring system explained

0-30% Intolerable
A crime against gaming. Whether it's bugs or bad design, this should be shot on sight.

31-45% Weak
Serious flaws ruin any chance this game has of offering sustained fun.

46-60% Mediocre
A very ordinary game, quickly forgotten. Think twice, even if you find it cheap.

61-75% Fair
A decent effort that, but for a little more polish, coulda been a contender.

76-89% Good
Enjoyable, well-made and entertaining—just falling short of true greatness.

90%+ Editor's Choice
A glowing example within its genre of excellence in design and execution.

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★
A game scoring 80% or more is eligible to receive the PC Gamer Editor's Choice award. The Editor's personal seal of approval means we think the recipient is a truly great example of its genre.

PC Gamer's 10 Latest and Greatest

Sid Meier's Civilization V (93%)
November '10

StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty (93%)
November '10

Monkey Island 2 SE (90%)
October '10

Sleep is Death (90%)
July '10

LOVE (86%)
July '10

Dawn of War II: Chaos Rising (91%)
May '10

Mass Effect 2 (90%)
March '10

BioShock 2 (90%)
March '10

Left 4 Dead 2 (92%)
January '10

Dragon Age: Origins (92%)
Holiday '09

The joy of *A Killer's Skill* is that it showcases *Crysis* at its best. It's beautiful, fast, chaotic, and not an alien in sight.

Explosive barrels still included.

1 Paradise lost

MOD IT'LL TAKE **A KILLER'S SKILL** TO SURVIVE THIS MOD

A Killer's Skill is a survival mod for *Crysis* that drops you into a single beautiful, cleverly-designed map and asks you to defend your slice of paradise against waves of invading enemies.

Even by the standards of *Crysis*'s glowing beaches and swaying palms, *A Killer's Skill* is especially idyllic. I could quite happily move there and spend the rest of my life dipping my toes in its shallow pools. It's almost unthinkable that violence could happen in such a place. Until the shooting starts, of course.

EVAN SAYS...
"Thinking of taking a beach break in *Crysis*? Be sure to pack sunscreen. And a rocket launcher."

The mod's carefully-tweaked AI means that your foes do a competent job of finding you, but that doesn't mean they can't be tricked. The level is just big enough to give you room to manoeuver the enemy, and encourages the kind of sneakiness that made fighting humans so much fun in the original game. Just as with *Crysis*' most electric fights, *A Killer's Skill* captures the thrill of being the perfect predator. A high perch by the waterfall gives an excellent overview of the level. From here, stragglers can be identified and picked off one by one.

After a just a few waves you'll likely know the area inside out, and the various nooks and crannies make hiding more than possible, which turns everything into a game of achieving the perfect takedown. When it goes well, it's sublime. I like to de-cloak from the forest, snatch up a hapless victim, throw him into a tree and vanish silently into the water to let the Nanosuit recharge. Often, of course, it goes horribly wrong, like the time I went to grab my victim, missed the button and threw a grenade very gently into his surprised face. For times like these there's a gauss cannon in the central wooden structure, an enormous supply of grenades and a few explosive barrels carefully scattered throughout the environment. **EL**

SIZE 40MB LINK http://bit.ly/bSDkBp

2 SKINS

HATE COUTURE

BEING EVIL WITH STYLE

Blood mages are a fashionable bunch, but were limited by *Dragon Age*'s lack of accessories. Here's a pick of the finest trinkets out there, courtesy of *DA*'s prolific modding community. **RM**

Blood robe
Everyone knows that you can't be a blood mage without a robe of blood. Become a murderous man of the cloth with these stylish vestments. ***http://bit.ly/cZHHlm***

Blood bling
Impress the ninth circle of hell the next time you visit with this eye-catching crimson bling. Don't be seen undead without it. ***http://bit.ly/dxLCN1***

Blood brawn
Looking good, but going into battle unarmed would risk tarnishing your jewelry. This small pack comes with a dagger, a crossbow and a full set of armor. ***http://bit.ly/cvP4Ks***

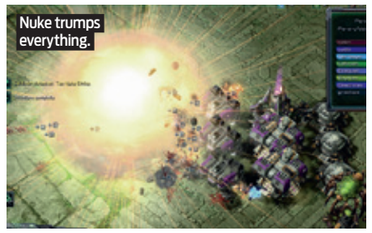
Kittens!
Finally, the perfect compliment to your sacrificial, blood soaked lifestyle. Adds infinite kittens to your inventory. ***http://bit.ly/diOqCC***

3 Custom carnage

MODS OUR PICK OF THE BEST **STARCRAFT II** CUSTOM MAPS

StarCraft's long beta period gave tinkerers plenty of time to get to grips with its powerful editing tools. Prior to release, these mods were gestating like a brood of hungry Zerglings. Now that they're out in the wild, they've matured.

Here are a few of our favorites. Each of these custom maps spins *StarCraft II*'s familiar ruleset in a unique way. They're also a great distraction from the dog-eat-dog world of the competitive ladders. Custom maps are most easily acquired from within Battle.net. In fact, the brilliant Nexus Wars can only be played by joining an in-progress custom game online. **TS**


Nuke trumps everything.

Nexus Wars

You control a lone SCV in this multiplayer tug-of-war on a dual highway of death. Your aim is to build the right combination of structures (which automatically spit out units at intervals) to counter enemy forces. A quick, infinitely-replayable exercise in attrition.

SIZE 5MB LINK www.battle.net (*SCII* client)

Where's that nuke when you need it?

Zombies Attack

This eight-player map sees you fending off waves of undead. Each player controls a human warrior with access to upgradable abilities. Turrets help manage the horde; the blink ability lets you teleport out of trouble. Downed players return to fight as zombies.

SIZE 5MB LINK http://bit.ly/aXkUsR

Zealots vs. Zerglings? Looks like this month's Face Off column.

Defense of the Universe

Defense of the Ancients started out as a custom map for Blizzard's *Warcraft III*. It's back. The Orcs have been replaced by Marines and the crossbows with lasers; otherwise *DotU* is the familiar combination of tower defense, hero progression and base management.

SIZE 3MB LINK http://bit.ly/cG14ES

4 MOD

HISTORICAL COMBAT

TRAPPED IN 1993? PLAY *MODERN WARFARE 2* DOS-STYLE

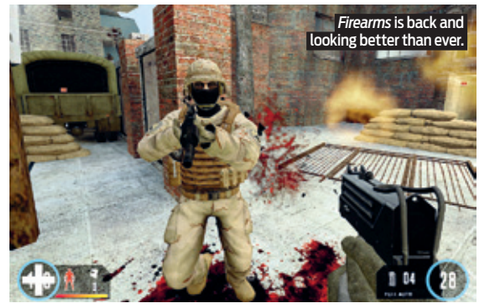
Do you ever look at your poor, weak netbook and wish that you could somehow play *Modern Warfare* on that tiny screen? Well now you almost sort of can! *Modern Warfare for the Poor* is a quick and easy mod that brings all the hyper-macho military goodness of *Call of Duty* to your copy of *Doom*.

It's actually quite surreal. The weapons, firing and reload animations have been rotoscoped in from *Modern Warfare*. The intrusion of modern mechanics like firing through iron sights and hot-keyed knife kills sit oddly with the ancient, fireball-tossing demon foes, but weirdly enough, it's brilliant fun. The the new weapons feel even more explosive and satisfying than *Doom*'s originals and the game's speed and simplicity make for some top-grade running and gunning. It's perfectly implemented, and it makes revisiting those blocky old levels a surprisingly visceral experience. **TS**

SIZE 50MB
LINK http://bit.ly/dkkYBf

5 War trials

MOD **FIREARMS: SOURCE** PACKS SERIOUS HEAT


Firearms is back and looking better than ever.

Over a decade ago, *Firearms* brought vicious team combat to *Quake*. The second mod for *Half-Life* went on to influence Valve's classic, *Counter-Strike*. Now most of the veteran team of modders have disbanded, but a determined squad of fresh talent has resurrected the name and rebuilt *Firearms* from the ground up in Source, adding a few new features in the process.

The key appeal of *Firearms: Source* lies in the speed and lethality of the gunplay and the cash for kills system that sees you upgrading your weapons between rounds. In addition to this, there's now also a *Battlefield 2*-style leveling system that lets you improve selected skills with play. Experience earned by plugging enemies can be used to buff stats such as your reload speed or accuracy, though thankfully, not to any game-breaking degree.

There are eight maps to fight for, all of which revolve around capture points that need to be held to secure victory. While not especially pretty, they're solidly-designed arenas that offer plenty of variation, from jungle environments to dusty Middle Eastern cities. On top of all this, there's an even more impressive roster of weapons. With 33 to choose from, it's tempting to keep playing just to try them all out. The dev team is still working hard building new maps and ironing out creases in the code. The veterans will be watching closely, and so will we. This private's got potential. **RM**

SIZE 850MB LINK www.firearms-source.com

How to graduate to Gold league in SC2

GET STARTED

DIFFICULTY Moderate
TIME 15 minutes to learn; a lifetime to master

VITAL LINKS

Learn and discuss more strategies with the community at StarCraft Arena
www.starcraftarena.net

Watch game replays at The Game Station
http://bit.ly/caM7Nj

TWO STANDARD BUILD ORDERS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED IN MULTIPLAYER ***by Tyler Nagata***

You may have conquered *StarCraft II*'s singleplayer campaign, but the point-and-click tactics that worked so well against the game's AI won't help you when you're facing a human opponent. Even in lower leagues, *SC2*'s arena can be brutal.

It's tempting for new players to turtle in their base and aim for fast air units or to rush their opponent with a few cheap ground units. But these one-trick strategies won't get you past the Silver or Bronze leagues. You're going to need to expand your strategies if you want to see the real competitive action in the Gold, Platinum or Diamond leagues (a.k.a., the Promised Land).

That's why we've mapped out two standard build orders to help players get started. The guides below are by no means meant for advanced players, but they'll help ease beginners into competitive play and should boost anyone struggling in the Silver or Bronze league up to Gold ranks. They're also very open-ended, so you're free to adjust these strategies as you see fit.

FAST EXPAND TO 3M (MARINES, MARAUDERS AND MEDIVACS)

1 Begin the block

Who says Terrans need to hide in their base like cowards? This build will help you construct and defend a fast natural expansion so you can push out with a large ground army of Marines, Marauders, and Medivacs. It also opens up for further expansion and an easy transition to building more advanced units. Start by pumping SCVs from your Command Center until you reach 10/11 supply and place your first Supply Depot at the top of your ramp to begin blocking it off.

2 Upgrade to orbital

Once you've got 10 or 11 SCVs mining those tasty blue crystals in your base, it's a good idea to pull one SCV off the line to scout so you can see where your opponent has spawned on the map. Next, begin building a Barracks next to your first Supply Depot to further block off the ramp to your base. Continue producing SCVs until you reach 15/19 supply. Then, upgrade your Command Center to an Orbital Command and get ready to start your military-industrial complex.

3 Second-in-command

While your Command Center is upgrading, build at least two Marines and a second Supply Depot to complete the wall at the top of your ramp. This will allow you to ward off any early rush attacks. If you're lucky, you'll also prevent any enemy gatherer units from scouting your base. By now, you should have enough minerals to start building your second Command Center. Start construction in your base so it's easier to defend.

4 Build the Barracks

Continue producing SCVs and Supply Depots to steadily increase your army size while strengthening your economy. You're preparing to produce lots of Marines and Marauders, so add three more Barracks and a Refinery for Vespene Gas. Remember to use your Orbital Command to call in M.U.L.E.s for additional minerals and to scan your opponent. Scout the center of the map, capturing Xel'Naga Watchtowers if possible, so you can spot any incoming attacks.

5 Secure the expansion

You're very vulnerable at this point, so move with purpose and start pumping out Marines. Build at least three Bunkers at the foot of your ramp to defend your expansion. Position Marines behind the Bunkers to enter them ASAP. Lift up your second Command Center and land it behind the Bunkers. Continue building SCVs and Supply Depots. Upgrade your Barracks with Tech Labs (for Marauders and upgrades) and Fusion Cores (for mass Marines).

6 The three M's

Your main base's mineral fields should be saturated with SCVs, so transfer about eight to ten SCVs to your fresh expansion. Now you can begin to mass produce upgraded Marines and Marauders! Build a Factory and Starport to round out your army with several Medivacs. From here, you can push out towards your opponent with your sizable force. At this point, you should consider grabbing a second expansion, or even transition to a more mech or air-based army.

THE PROTOSS FOUR GATE

1 Pump your probes

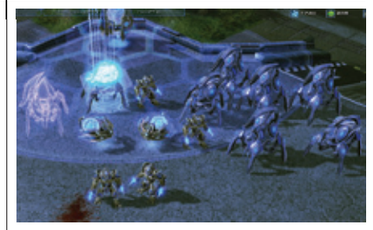
This build order will help you quickly build and position a ground force for an aggressive push into your opponent's base. Begin by Chrono Boosting your Nexus to pump out Probes and start warping in a Pylon when you reach 9/10 supply. At about 13 supply, you should warp in a Gateway at the top of your ramp and start an Assimilator. Don't forget to scout for your opponent's base location.

2 Boost your Warpgate

At around 15 supply, warp in your Cybernetics Core to develop a choke point at the top of the ramp. You'll need the Vespene Gas soon for Stalkers and Warpgate technology, which you should begin as soon as your Cybernetics Core is up. Warp in two Zealots and position them at the top of your ramp with the hold command to complete the block and prevent any early Zergling rushes.

3 Prepare the Gateways

Meanwhile, you should start three more Gateways and consider the placement of the proxy Pylon you will be using to quickly position your units near your opponent's base. Closer is better, but it's also more risky. For now, place your Pylon in the middle of the map near your opponent's natural expansion and upgrade your Gateways to Warpgates. Continue pumping Probes and Pylons while Chrono Boosting your Cybernetics Core to hasten your Warpgate research.



4 Position your forces

Move what units you have towards your proxy Pylon and begin taking advantage of your Warpgate technology to summon reinforcements just outside your opponent's base. Any intelligence you gathered will inform your decision to build more Zealots (stronger against Zerglings and Marauders) or Stalkers (stronger against Roaches). Have at least two Sentries to split up your opponent's forces with Force Fields and to protect your own army with Guardian Shields.

5 Push with power

It's time for the big push! Consider mapping your Warpgates to a control group so you can easily reinforce your army mid-combat. Keep your Zealots in front to soak damage and protect your Stalkers. Use the Alt key to pull up the health bars of all nearby units and make sure to have your Stalkers focus fire on weaker units to eliminate them as quickly as possible. Also, don't forget to use your Sentries' abilities!

6 Prepare for transition

If your opponent has attempted an early expansion and hasn't set up any static defense structures, like Spine Crawlers or Bunkers, you should be able to set him back considerably with your initial push. But if you meet strong resistance, this build is still great for keeping up the pressure. Consider starting an expansion and transitioning to producing more advanced units while keeping your opponent bottled up in his initial base.

SKILLS

MASTER THE ART OF *MINECRAFT* CRAFTING

BUILD YOURSELF BETTER TOOLS

1 Did you press "i" yet? You didn't, did you? Look, an inventory and crafting panel! Find a tree, break three blocks from it, and open your inventory. Stick them in the crafting panel, and pull out the plank blocks as above.

2 Using right-click, place four plank blocks in a square in your crafting panel and pull out the crafting bench, stick it on your toolbar, and place it in the world. Right-click on it to use your new, bigger crafting panel.

3 Finally, stack a plank on top of another plank to make a bundle of sticks, then arrange them like the picture above to make a wooden pickax. With that, you can mine stone for stone tools, which last longer.

BONUS SKILL

BUILD A BUCKET

Just three iron ingots and you can carry water. A bug means dropping it again makes an eternal fountain. More recipes: *http://bit.ly/minecrafting*.

TESTED

Maingear Shift

Maingear

Case porn.

In the 10 years since I began reviewing gaming PCs, my aesthetic tastes have changed somewhat. So have the world's. So has Maingear's. But out of the three of us, I'd say Maingear's got the edge.

I mean, *look* at this thing. The exterior design of the Maingear Shift somehow manages to accommodate both the 19-year-old nerdy guy who's bursting with pride at the high-end rig he bought with his first paycheck (or in this case, his first three paychecks) and the geeky 42-year-old UNESCO interpreter who wants a sophisticated rig that nonetheless tells her suitors, "Don't make me choose between you and *League of Legends*."

I worried that at some point the design or construction would fail me: a panel would be difficult to remove; a front-side USB port wouldn't be connected; too-tight wiring would discourage me from messing with components. No, no and nope.

And of course, it's fast. It had better be, for a price that exceeds that of a quality used car. But even though virtually all new high-end PCs outrun the previous generation, the Maingear Shift is a surprisingly distant leap ahead—easily equipped for even Nvidia's triple-display 3D Vision Sur-round, if you really want to go nuts. No offense to Intel and its fine Core i7-930 processor, but the nod goes to the dual Nvidia GTX 480s which, in SLI config, absolutely scream.

There's no evidence of thoughtless corner-cutting here, and the specs reflect intelligent design as opposed to simply pulling together parts from the top shelf: the Core i7-930 isn't the top-of-the-line, for example, but that matters less than the combination of twin GTX 480s and a 128GB SSD with TRIM support—this is a wonderfully balanced quartet for gamers.

I would have preferred discrete audio—although I admit that the eight-channel audio on the Asus Rampage III Extreme motherboard is more than adequate—as well as a Blu-ray writer instead of the included reader, and for some reason the 1TB, 7,200rpm hard drive on my test system hadn't been formatted. But these are relatively trivial issues.

The dual Nvidia GTX 480s in SLI configuration absolutely scream.

I've been getting off on rigs like these for years and have never felt jaded about the hardware. But even so, every once in a while a rig comes along that really hits the sweet spot and gets me rutting. The Maingear Shift is one of those rigs. Even if the price is too steep, the ace design, thoughtful specs and three-year warranty ought to give you plenty of confidence in Maingear's lower-end models as well. ■

Logan Decker

$3,892, www.maingear.com
Category: Dream

SPEC ◆ **CPU** Core i7-930 2.8GHz ◆ **RAM** 6GB DDR3 ◆ **GPU** GeForce GTX 480 (x2) ◆ **Storage** 128GB SSD w/TRIM, 1TB 7,200RPM HD ◆ **OS** Win 7 Home Premium 64-bit ◆ **3DMark06/Vantage** 28,471/P38,781 ◆ **Crysis** 96fps ◆ **SupCom** 84fps (1680x1050)

VERDICT

Beautiful inside and out and a bruiser in the benchmarks, Maingear's Shift is PC craftsmanship at its finest—but not its most affordable.

PC GAMER **93**

TESTED

Thrustmaster Ferrari Wireless GT Cockpit 430

The Ferrari you can park in your closet *by Andy Mahood*

Sleek and sexy like the $200,000 Italian sports car that inspired it, Thrustmaster's Ferrari Wireless GT Cockpit 430 Scuderia Edition is a well engineered and elegant wheel-and-pedal set that'll meet the demands of most PC racing fans—as long as they don't demand too much.

Performed by a professional driver on a closed course. Do not attempt at home.

Despite its rhetorical "cockpit" moniker, this is actually a wireless one-piece wheel-and-pedal design (with a telescoping steering column) that folds flat for easy storage. It takes up a relatively modest amount of floor space, and setup is as easy as unfolding it, adjusting the height and rake to suit your preferred couch or chair seating position, plugging in a USB dongle, and firing up your favorite racing game. With its wide, weighted pedal base and predominantly metal construction the contraption remains firmly anchored no matter how hamfisted your driving technique. I experienced zero latency with the 2.4GHz wireless connection and the wheels and pedal response was spot-on with every PC racing title I tested (including *iRacing.com*, *DiRT 2*, *rFactor*, and *RACE On*).

The unit features a form-fitting rubberized wheel that's purportedly an exact 7/10-scale replica of the real Ferrari F430 wheel (minus Maranello's expensive Alcantara leather and carbon-fiber bits). It also includes a five-position "Manettino" dial to configure driving sensitivity and other in-game settings as well as a small D-pad disguised as the Ferrari's wheel-mounted start button. Magnetic (rather than wear-prone mechanical) sensors provide steering, brake, and throttle input and some robust, all-metal F430-style pedals and paddle shifters complete the Prancing Horse dynamic.

Unfortunately, Thrustmaster cut too many corners for the Wireless Cockpit to make any hardcore sim fan's wish list. The chief omission is force-feedback—a critical component in modern PC racing sims. The absence of a clutch pedal is another lapse. (Thrustmaster maintains the real Ferrari F430 doesn't have one, but that's of little comfort to demanding PC racers who like to roll with a variety of modern and vintage racing machines.) And the excessive spacing between the throttle and brake pedals, while necessary to accommodate the folding steering column, makes heeling-and-toeing a near impossibility.

So while the Ferrari Wireless GT Cockpit 430 Scuderia Edition is a slick, functional, and pricey all-in-one controller, don't expect it to challenge Logitech's or Fanatec's similarly valued kits for top dog driving honors. ■

$250, www.thrustmaster.com
Category: Dream

VERDICT

It's compact, stable and wireless, but the GT Cockpit 430 falls short of the perfect all-around wheel for racing fans.

PC GAMER **73**

Q&A

Display Abuse

Q: Can I overclock my display? Let's say I have an old standard LCD I don't care too much about, but want to see if I can push it to 120MHz to make it compatible with Nvidia's 3D Vision glasses—is there any way to do this? I don't really care if I burn out the display, but it would be cool if I could do it even for just a while so I could try out the glasses. ***Scott W.***

A: *No.* Extra *no. Displays use a little block of built-in data called EDID (Extended Display Identification Data) to let videocards know what resolutions and refresh rates they support. While it's possible to override this data with hardware alterations or a special adapter, I'm not aware of any software-based method of overriding this information, and I doubt it would do you much good if there was. Unlike CPUs and GPUs, which are overclockable as a byproduct of their manufacturing and labeling processes, displays are unlikely to tolerate being pushed even slightly beyond their reported refresh rates—much less* doubled, *as would be necessary for Nvidia's 3D Vision.*

Hot-rodding's for processors and videocards, not displays!

But if your goal is to simply give 3D Vision a whirl, you can buy the kit—including Acer's GD235HZ 120MHz 23.5-inch, 1920x1080 LCD—at Nvidia's own online store ($609 plus shipping, www.nvidia.com), and get your money back within 30 days if you're not into it (though you must pay for return shipping). Or just hang out at Best Buy for an afternoon. **LD**

Hard Stuff Trinity

DREAM SYSTEM		MID-RANGE		ENTRY-LEVEL	
CASE AND PSU Cooler Master Cosmos; 850W PSU	$300	**CASE AND PSU** Nzxt Alpha; Gamexstream 700W PSU	$187	**CASE AND PSU** Generic Case; Corsair 450W PSU	$161
PROCESSOR Intel Core i7-950 3.06GHz	$550	**PROCESSOR** Intel Core i7-920 2.66GHz	$256	**PROCESSOR** AMD Athlon X2 6000+ 3.0GHz	$57
MOTHERBOARD Asus P6T Deluxe V2	$262	**MOTHERBOARD** Asus P6T	$244	**MOTHERBOARD** Asus M3A76-CM	$68
MEMORY Corsair 6GB DDR3-1600	$154	**MEMORY** Corsair 6GB DDR3-1333	$178	**MEMORY** Corsair 2GB DDR2-800	$58
OPTICAL DRIVE LG BD370 Blu-ray	$174	**OPTICAL DRIVE** LG GH22NP20	$25	**OPTICAL DRIVE** Sony DDU1681S	$19
HARD DRIVE Intel X25-M 80GB SSD; WD 500GB 7200RPM	$311	**HARD DRIVE** WD 500GB 7200RPM	$50	**HARD DRIVE** WD 250GB 7200RPM	$40
SOUNDCARD Creative Labs X-Fi Titanium	$130	**SOUNDCARD** Onboard	$0	**SOUNDCARD** Onboard	$0
VIDEOCARD Radeon HD 5870 (2)	$780	**VIDEOCARD** Radeon HD 5870	$399	**VIDEOCARD** GeForce GT 220	$65
TOTAL PRICE	**$2,661**	**TOTAL PRICE**	**$1,339**	**TOTAL PRICE**	**$468**

TESTED

Das Keyboard Professional S

Metadot

The Das Keyboard series reminds me of all the guns we saw in the *The Matrix*: they didn't have to look that cool to get the job done, but it was awesome that they did. Similarly, you can buy a decent gaming keyboard for as little as $60, but it probably won't look—and certainly won't *feel*—like the Das Keyboard, which is constructed with mechanical switches (as opposed to membrane or scissor switches) for that distinctive *clackity-clack* with every keystroke. It supports more simultaneous keypresses than you'll ever need, and while the keyboard requires two USB ports (or one USB port and one PS/2 port), the built-in dual USB ports are less finicky with power-hungry devices as a result.

Also available with blank keys, for hardcores.

The Professional S model is intended for gamers who want the sturdiness and handling of the Das Keyboard without the high-decibel report from each stroke. This is odd, however, because the Professional S isn't much quieter than the original Das Keyboard. In fact, it's difficult to tell the difference at all, and this is certainly not a fair compromise for co-workers or significant others who are being driven slowly mad by the noise. Also, I'd have preferred a braided fabric cable, and it still lacks pass-through jacks for your headset, which puts sad on my face.

The sturdiness of the Das Keyboard without the high-decibel report from each stroke.

That said, it's still a Das Keyboard, and whether it's silent or just slightly quieter, it's one of the most rugged, capable and sexy sidearms a gamer can wield. **LD**

PC GAMER **85**

$135, www.daskeyboard.com

SEVERELY DISTURBED MAN CITED FOR SMUGGLING WEAPONIZED PLANTS | Page A9

Zoey Named "Sexiest Survivor" For 4th Consecutive Year

Runner-up, Coach, accepts hamburger-shaped silver medal | Page B3

HEADCRAB AND BUTTCRAB IN DISPUTE OVER HOST BODY | Page A3

UNDEAD WEEKLY

June 29, 2014 | *"BRAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIIINS."* | $2.49

Boomers Move to Ban Spitters

Portliest of zombiekind supports controversial new "Infectigration Bill"

By Christopher Livingston

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA — A number of infected Boomers, angered by the sudden arrival of Spitters and other new breeds of infected, have introduced new legislation to keep their acid-hawking cousins out of the state of Georgia.

Many Boomers feel that, with a limited number of uninfected humans to attack, the appearance of new infected types put their jobs at risk.

"There are only so many survivors to vomit on," one Boomer gurgled through a translator. "Four, to be precise. And these Spitters are flooding into our state in scores, spitting acid everywhere. I say, go back to where you came from. I was here ages ago, and propelling disgusting gunk from my mouth onto uninfected humans is my job. That job is now in jeopardy."

"How many times have I been lurking behind a hedge, preparing to vomit on an approaching survivor, only to see a Spitter spray acid on him? From 50 yards away, I might add. And then the survivors scatter, denying me my chance."

Dozens of disgruntled Boomers form a vomit mob outside City Maul.

The controversial issue has resulted in a number of protests in support of the proposed Infectigration Bill. One Boomer rally saw the infected waving signs and chanting slogans, though the signs were crudely drawn and the chanting was mostly unintelligible groaning.

"I'm literally vomiting with rage over this issue," burped one Boomer. "Granted, I'm vomiting with rage all the time anyway. But this time my rage-vomit is directed at these new infected types."

"They're stealing our jobs right out from under our pulsing, distended bile sacks," he added. Then, he vomited.

The new strains of infected are objecting to the nature of the proposal, however, saying their presence actually helps the original breeds of infected do their jobs more efficiently.

"We actually help Boomers do their jobs," said a Charger. "The Spitter is great at slowing survivors down by dropping a pool of acid in front of them, giving other infected a chance to spring their traps. Jockeys can steer survivors right over to the Boomer, giving him a nice, helpless target to vomit on."

"We're not taking away jobs, we're driving the industry," the Charger continued. "The industry of rending uninfected humans to death with our terrible claws."

The issue has even drawn the attention of local celebrities, such as the infected body of famed stock car racer Jimmy Gibbs, Jr., who is calling for tolerance in working toward a common goal: the death of all survivors.

"Bottom line, we're all infected," said Gibbs. "Some were infected sooner than others, true. We may be new, but we're not going away, and we deserve the same respect as any other twisted, virus-addled monster."

"We need to work together," Gibbs continued. We're all part of what makes this world a better place. By which I mean, a more horrifying landscape of death and decay."